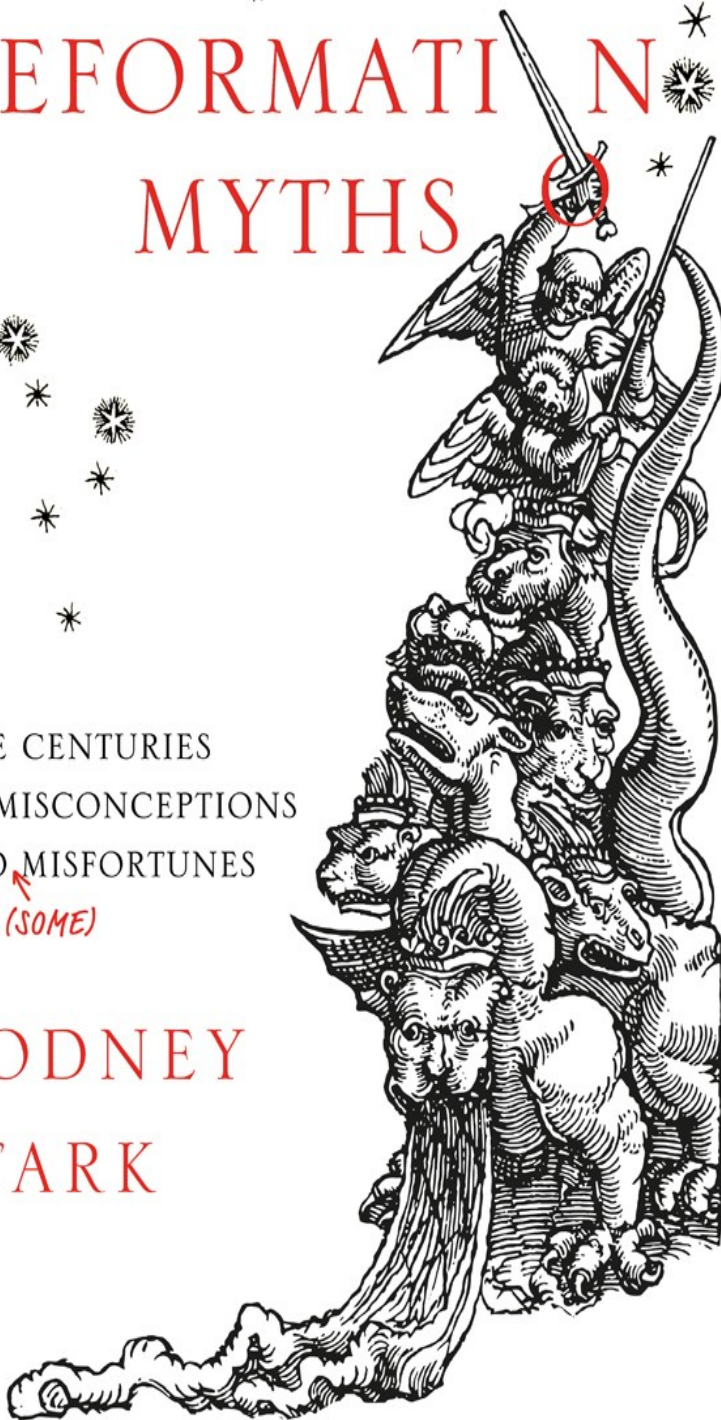


# REFORMATION MYTHS

FIVE CENTURIES  
OF MISCONCEPTIONS  
AND MISFORTUNES

↑  
(SOME)

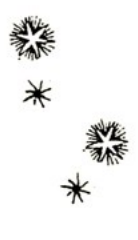
RODNEY  
STARK







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*(SOME)*

RODNEY  
STARK

SPCK

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# Introduction

## The mythical 'Protestant'

The date of 31 October 2017 is the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's nailing his *Ninety-five Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, thereby initiating what became known as the Protestant Reformation. Throughout the year, hundreds of scholarly conferences celebrating the event are being held in all the leading Protestant nations, and

even those with Catholic participants will express profound admiration for the many ways in which the Reformation played a major role in the creation of the modern West.

However, an embarrassing question that must be answered at any celebration of the Reformation is: which one do you mean? Three successful Reformations, plus outbursts of Anabaptism, occurred during the sixteenth century (ignoring recent claims that there was a whole series of English

Reformations).<sup>1</sup> The only common feature of the three successful Reformations was their rejection of papal authority; otherwise they were quite at odds. Luther's most important theological claim was that salvation comes through faith alone. John Calvin taught that salvation cannot be achieved by any means, but is conferred by God for unknown reasons upon only a chosen few. And Henry VIII's English Reformation conformed to the Roman Catholic position that salvation can

be achieved through works as well as faith.

Bitter hatreds also separated these three Reformations. The

Lutherans formed monopoly state churches and prohibited all other faiths, subsequently

hunting down 'crypto-Calvinists' and burning some of them in Saxony during the 1580s.<sup>2</sup> They

also were hostile to 'any people suspected of Anabaptism or of abusing the holy sacraments by practicing Zwinglianism'.<sup>3</sup>

The Calvinists permitted no 'heresy' in Geneva, and

persecuted violators. As for Henry VIII, he not only beheaded some Catholic prelates; he also burned a number of Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists and other 'heretics'.

Consequently, the many celebrations held during 2017 can hardly be in honour of *the* Reformation. Nor does it seem likely that the celebrants are united in honouring the Lutheran Reformation, let alone the English Reformation. The only plausible common basis for all these events is to celebrate the rise of Protestantism. This raises



Protestantism has led to secularization. And very little probably will be said about the need for ‘priest holes’ in many English manor houses, or about laws requiring regular church attendance in England and northern Europe. As for Luther’s legacy of violent anti-Semitism, it probably will not be mentioned.

There is an additional and compelling question that probably also will go unaddressed: what is a Protestant? In this brief Introduction I will demonstrate that the



the Vatican that first used the word Protestant ‘to lump together . . . a group of loosely interconnected but ultimately distinct movements’.<sup>4</sup> Today, the standard dictionary definition is vague and negative: ‘a Protestant is any Christian who is not a Roman Catholic or an Eastern Orthodox Catholic’. Some dictionaries also exclude Anglicans. Nowhere is there a positive definition such as ‘a Protestant is one who . . .’ The reason for this is simply that it is impossible to list a set of

beliefs held in common by all who are called Protestants, or to discover any other feature held in common. Even from earliest days this was true. About all that Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans and Anabaptists agreed upon was the divinity of Jesus and the wickedness of the pope.

## **Thousands of ‘Protestant’ denominations**

If, even in Luther’s time, the word Protestant lacked any coherent theological or

organizational meaning, consider that since then, 'Protestants' have splintered into approximately 33,000 independent denominations worldwide, according to the 2001 edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*. Perhaps as many as 11,000 Protestant denominations are in sub-Saharan Africa alone. Great Britain has more than 500 independent Protestant denominations, ranging from the huge Church of England to small evangelical groups. And





very small – the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation has only about 1,000 members in 15 congregations. There is an amazing degree of theological variation within this ‘family’. The Evangelical Lutherans are very liberal; the Missouri Lutherans are very conservative.

### *The Reformed–Presbyterian Family.*

Here are the many variations on Calvinism, including the Puritans who founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Melton



having more than 300,000 members.

The primary fact is that the ‘average’ Protestant is a statistical fiction, as has been clear since the very first surveys of religious belief were conducted. Table I.1 is based on a survey of American church members conducted in 1963. Reading down the columns, it is obvious that in some major denominations few believed in these traditional Christian doctrines; in some other major bodies, nearly everyone believed.

# Table I.1 Denomination and religious beliefs in the USA in 1963

Denomination	Belief in (percentage)		
	Virgin birth	Second coming	Devil
Congregational*	21	13	6
Methodist	34	21	13
Episcopal	39	24	17
Disciples of Christ	62	36	18
Presbyterian	57	43	31
American Lutheran	66	54	49
American Baptist	69	57	49
Missouri Lutheran	97	75	77
Southern Baptist	99	94	92
Various Evangelical Groups	96	89	90
<b>Total Protestant</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>66</b>

\* Now the United Church of Christ.

Source: Stark and Glock, 1968.

Despite these findings, which have been well known for nearly 50 years

and have been replicated many times since, when I recently searched JSTOR for the word ‘Protestant’ in the title of published social science papers, I obtained 52,522 results, and JSTOR does not include many of the major journals. Here are a few of these titles:

Protestant–Catholic  
Differences in  
Educational  
Achievement.

Catholic/Protestant  
Differences in Marital  
Status.



Catholic comparisons are nonsense.

Of course, sometimes the word Protestant can be used meaningfully. Fully in keeping with the current dictionary definition, it sometimes is useful to distinguish Christians who accept the pope's authority from those who don't. For example, using the term 'Protestant nation' to distinguish Denmark from France is legitimate and useful, so long as one remains aware of the remarkable religious diversity entailed by that identification. In any event,





# 1: The myths of full pews, pious kings and limited monarchies

It is well known that by the time Luther rebelled against the Vatican, Europe's churches were very poorly attended. It has long been believed that one of the most immediate and significant results of the Lutheran Reformation was to fill the pews. Moreover, it wasn't only the common folk whose piety was ignited by the great Lutheran revival campaign, but even some of the crowned heads of northern

Europe soon were bowed in prayer as they embraced Protestantism. Moreover, after centuries of tyrannical rule by absolute monarchs, the Reformations ushered in a new era of limited monarchies, putting an end to the ‘divine right of kings’.

## **The people's Reformation**

The image of medieval piety, of churches filled with devout peasants, has no historical basis. As Michael Walzer put it, ‘Medieval society was





all successful religious movements are based on the ‘people’, on those with less than an ample share of life’s rewards. As Richard Niebuhr (1894–1962) explained in his famous *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, a new religious movement is always ‘a revolt of the poor’.<sup>5</sup> Protestantism was another of the great heresies that arose in Europe because of ‘the desire of the poor to improve the material conditions of their lives’, as Norman Cohn (1915–2007) put it.<sup>6</sup> Hence, social







multiplied a hundredfold.’<sup>9</sup> Consider these excerpts in the light of the fact that in most places the people *were required by law* to attend church services.

In Saxony: ‘You’ll find more of them out fishing than at service . . . Those who do come walk out as soon as the pastor begins his sermon.’<sup>10</sup> In

Seegrehna: ‘A pastor testified that he often quits his church without preaching . . . because not a soul has turned up to hear him.’<sup>11</sup> In Coburg: ‘Nothing seemed to avail against widespread absenteeism









inside the church, ‘barking and snarling so loudly that no one can hear the preacher’.<sup>18</sup> In Hamburg: ‘[people make] indecent gestures at members of the congregation who wish to join in singing the hymns, even bringing dogs to church so that due to the loud barking the service is disturbed’.<sup>19</sup>

Given these attitudes and lack of attendance, it is hardly surprising that the German masses (and most Europeans) were ignorant of even basic Christian facts. In Saxony: ‘In some villages one could not find



not name Good Friday as the day of the year when Jesus died'. The pastor at Grain complained: 'Since they never go to church, most of them cannot even say their prayers.'

'It is unnecessary to add that the visitors found everywhere evidence of prodigious drinking, horrible blasphemy, whoring, witchcraft and soothsaying, and widespread contempt for the clergy.'<sup>20</sup> Similar findings hold that things 'were little better in some Calvinist areas of Germany

and in the Dutch Republic .

..<sup>'21</sup>

Things were the same in England. The Uniformity Act passed by Parliament in 1552 stated: 'a great number of people in divers parts of this realm . . . do willfully and damnably before Almighty God abstain and refuse to come to their parish churches . .

..<sup>'22</sup> Consequently, the ordinary people knew little or nothing of Christianity. As Nicholas Brown<sup>d</sup> remarked in 1606, the stories in the Bible are 'as strange to them as any news you can tell them'.

And a Church of England bishop lamented that not only did the people know nothing from the Scriptures, but ‘they know not that there *are* any Scriptures’.<sup>23</sup> At this same time, it was reported that in Wales ‘there were thousands of people who knew nothing of Christ – yea almost that never heard of him’.<sup>24</sup>

And it wasn’t only the people who knew little or nothing of Christian teachings; many rank-and-file clergy were equally ignorant. When the Bishop of Gloucester

systematically tested Church of England diocesan clergy in 1551, of 311 pastors, 171 could not repeat the Ten Commandments, and 27 did not know the author of the Lord's Prayer.<sup>25</sup> The next year, Church of England Bishop Hooper found 'scores of parish clergy who could not tell who was the author of the Lord's Prayer, or where it was to be found'.<sup>26</sup>

Prior to the Reformations, many churchmen had been fully aware of the ignorance of the people. Most assumed





intricate nuances than with the ABCs of Christian belief – not with simply making people familiar with the Lord's Prayer, for example, but with revealing its subtle implications. The heart of Lutheran religious education was Luther's Catechism, which provides a very lengthy explication of basic Christian doctrines. For example, it devotes many pages of rather convoluted text to interpreting each of the Ten Commandments. The local Lutheran clergy were supposed to preach from the Catechism every

Sunday afternoon and hold classes for young people during the week.

In most villages these sessions were not held because no one came. That does not mean the people were irreligious, but that:

what parishioners understood as Christianity was never preached from the pulpit or taught in Sunday school, and what they took from the clergy they took on their own terms . . . Since the clergy were incapable of shaping a more popular







Some fortune tellers really can foresee the future (fortune tellers).

A person's star sign at birth can affect the course of his or her future (astrology).

Good luck charms do bring good luck (lucky charms).

Table 1.1 shows levels of belief in three nations where a Reformation succeeded and four that remained Catholic. Belief in magic is about equally high on both sides of the denominational divide and rather higher than most

would expect in our ‘modern’ world – and especially in ‘secularized’ Europe.

**Table 1.1      Magical beliefs in Europe in 2008**

<i>Nation</i>	<i>Percentage who believe in:</i>		
	<i>Fortune tellers</i>	<i>Astrology</i>	<i>Lucky charms</i>
<i>‘Protestant’ Nations</i>			
Germany	25	32	37
Netherlands	26	21	19
Switzerland	35	42	36
<i>Catholic Nations</i>			
Austria	28	32	33
France	37	38	23
Ireland	31	17	24
Portugal	27	29	45

*Source:*                      International Social Survey Project, 2008.

## Pious kings

In many instances, the decision as to whether a particular place would turn Protestant or remain Catholic was ‘bound up with the convictions of the head of state’.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the historical literature there are frequent references to the ‘piety’ of those rulers who chose Protestantism.<sup>32</sup> The ‘firm commitment to Lutheranism’<sup>33</sup> of Christian III of Denmark is unquestioned, and the piety of rulers who chose to remain Catholic is often

noted, especially in Catholic sources. Indeed, the point would seem self-evident since these were *religious* choices. Nevertheless, it wasn't so. Everyone knows that Henry VIII was an opportunist. So were most of the others. They became Protestants or remained Catholics, not primarily for religious motives, but depending on how much they stood to gain!<sup>34</sup>

## **Staying Catholic**

In 1296 King Philip of France, desperate for funds

to continue the war with England, imposed a tax on Church income. Outraged, Pope Boniface VIII issued a bull forbidding taxation of the clergy or of Church property. In response, Philip outlawed the export of money or precious metals and prohibited papal tax collectors from entering France. Subsequently, the papacy moved to Avignon in 1305, partly to be within legal reach of French funds, and remained there until 1378, during which all popes were French. However, even after the papacy

moved back to Rome, the Church in France remained subordinate to the Crown. Throughout the fifteenth century the king's authority over the Church expanded. At the start of the sixteenth century this eventuated in substantial reforms of the Church in France (particularly of the monasteries), directed by Cardinal d'Amboise, and empowered by the king. Then, in 1516 the power of the Crown was formalized in the Concordat of Bologna signed by Pope Leo X and King Francis I. The king was





appeals from Spanish courts to Rome, and to impose taxes on the clergy.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, it was illegal to publish papal bulls and decrees in Spain or its possessions without prior royal consent – which is why, decades later, the pope's decrees against slavery could not be read in Spain's slave-holding colonies in the New World.<sup>38</sup> These same conditions prevailed in Portugal.

The subordination of the Church to the state increased under Charles V (1500–58), as Spain

became the centre of the Holy Roman Empire, extending its power to the Netherlands, Austria, portions of south-eastern 'Germany', and most of the Italian city states. Although Charles incurred huge costs in defending and attempting to extend his vast holdings, the lure of Church property was more than offset by three factors. First, he already was receiving a substantial portion of Church income. Second, the pope's support was valuable in helping Charles sustain his claims to sovereignty, especially in





the appointment of parish clergy. Thus, no windfall profits tempted the Polish Crown to embrace Protestantism. As Robert Wuthnow put it, the Polish nobility ‘enjoyed sufficient control over the church that they had little incentive to turn toward Protestantism’.<sup>39</sup>

## **Becoming ‘Protestants’**

In contrast, in other parts of Europe the enormous value of Church property, and the Church’s continuing financial extractions, served as





central Protestant doctrines and continued to burn some Lutherans and Lollards! So Henry could not even pretend to be motivated by theology. He merely declared an English, rather than a Roman, Catholic Church, with himself as head, rather than the pope. That act alone would have sufficed to enable him to take and shed wives as he saw fit. Of course, he could not leave in place those church officials and members of religious orders who disputed him as the head of the Church,

but having made what replacements were necessary there was no need to dissolve all the monasteries and convents. But he did, thereby gaining enormous wealth. Consider that from the shrine dedicated to St Thomas à Becket alone, Henry's agents confiscated 4,994 ounces of gold, 4,425 ounces of silver gilt, 5,286 ounces of silver and 26 cartloads of other treasure – and this was regarded at the time as but a trivial portion of the wealth confiscated from the

Church.<sup>40</sup> And trivial it was, given that it is estimated that Henry gained about £87 billion (in today's money)<sup>41</sup> per year from his initial seizures and millions more subsequently.<sup>42</sup>

In Denmark, at the dawn of the sixteenth century from a third to half of all the tillable land was owned by the Church, and everyone else paid tithes – substantial amounts of which went to Rome. The pope also made all ecclesiastical appointments. In 1534 Christian III became king.

As a boy of 18, Christian had met Luther at the Diet of Worms and was very impressed. This fact alone has led numerous authors to credit his making Denmark a Protestant state entirely out of religious concerns. Perhaps. But it also must be noted that Christian was very impressed with the confiscations of Church property and wealth by the Protestant princes in Germany. Once upon the throne, he declared Denmark a Protestant state and immediately seized all Church property and

redirected the tithes to the royal treasury. What were his motives? Of course, he said they were religious. And perhaps they were. But he could have left the Church property in the hands of the new Lutheran Church. But he didn't.

Meanwhile, Sweden successfully rebelled against Denmark's rule as Gustavus Vasa drove the Danes out of Sweden and was formally crowned King Gustavus I in 1528. Here, too, the Church had enjoyed unchallenged authority and enormous wealth. When the new king

deposed an uncooperative archbishop and nominated replacements for four empty bishoprics, the pope supported the deposed archbishop and rejected Gustavus's nominees. To this affront was added the fact that the new king was in desperate need of funds. He dealt with both concerns by declaring Sweden to be a Protestant state, and by appropriating 'the possessions and revenues of the Church'.<sup>43</sup> To strengthen his support among the nobility, Gustavus sold them expropriated Church land



extensive, untaxed Church properties, and with large numbers of resident clergy and members of religious orders who refused to perform the duties required of other citizens. In most of these cities at least one-third of the property belonged to the Church and as many as a tenth of the residents were clergy and members of orders.<sup>45</sup> In nearly every city there was substantial conflict between Church and city over special privileges, mainly because of the magnitude of the Church's presence.<sup>46</sup> The



days people were routinely executed for quite minor crimes. No matter their offence, priests, monks and nuns could be tried only by a religious court and ran nearly no risk of the death penalty or even a very severe sentence – murderers were often sentenced to several years of fasting. Nor would the clergy or members of orders fulfil such duties as taking their turn standing guard at night on the city walls, as all other able-bodied men were required to do. Hence, all lay people in these cities had a stake

in shifting to Protestantism and about two-thirds of these cities did so.<sup>47</sup>

To sum up: self-interest played a very major role in deciding who opted to turn Protestant or to remain Catholic.

## **Limited monarchies**

It is commonly claimed that the Reformations put an end to the doctrine of the ‘divine right of kings’, thereby revealing the entirely worldly basis of royal authority. Prior to that time, ‘belief in the God-given authority of

monarchs was central to the Roman Catholic vision of governance in the Middle Ages'.<sup>48</sup> Jared Rubin claimed that, lacking the support of the Church elite, Protestant monarchs had to turn to parliaments for support and thereby shared their power.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the Reformation inaugurated a new age of limited monarchies.

This is nonsense. The Church never endorsed the notion of the divine right of kings. That was first proclaimed by James I of England (1566–1625), a Protestant after whom the

King James Version of the Bible is named. Instead, the Catholic Church always asserted that its authority was greater than that of monarchs. From St Augustine through St Thomas Aquinas, the great Church theologians denied the moral authority of the state and condemned tyrants, warranting their overthrow. Moreover, the Church was entirely at ease with the limited democracies that evolved in the Italian city states long before any Reformations and in 1215 the English bishops

participated in forcing King John to sign the Magna Carta. Finally, by taking control of the Church as well as the state, many 'Protestant' monarchs were far more powerful than had been the case in these same kingdoms prior to the Reformations. Indeed, Luther fully supported 'the development of strong centralized states and absolute monarchies'.<sup>50</sup>

Now for the details.

In his great work *The City of God*, written in about 410, Augustine revealed that although the state was essential for an

orderly society, it still was lacking in fundamental legitimacy:

What are kingdoms but great robberies? For what are robberies themselves, but little kingdoms? The band itself is made up of men; it is ruled by the authority of a prince, it is knit together by the pact of confederacy; the booty is divided by the law agreed on. If, by the admittance of abandoned men, this evil increases to such a degree that it holds





the state, or even for dispensing with monarchies. Moreover, by affirming the secularity of kingship the Church made it possible to examine the basis for worldly power and the interplay of rights and rule. Late in the fourteenth century John Wycliffe pointed out that if kings were chosen by God and ruled with divine rights, then God must assist and approve the sins of tyrants – ‘a blasphemous conclusion’.<sup>53</sup> Hence it was not a sin to depose tyrants.

That had already been acknowledged a century







ruled by kings and princes. But these medieval monarchs were limited, in fact as well as in principle, by the role of the clergy who served them both as confessors and as advisers. In the latter role the clergy were powerful because of their ability to provide intelligence and serve as channels of communication. Through the network of clergy serving the entire nobility of Europe, clergy serving in any given court could provide otherwise unavailable information on the character, aims,

intentions and resources of potential adversaries – intelligence provided by fellow clergy serving in the same capacity elsewhere. In addition they could and often did serve as intermediaries and typically exerted their influence to prevent warfare. Indeed, a number of popes, including the illustrious Gregory VII (1020–85), devoted immense efforts to imposing a ‘truce of God’ on the feudal nobility.

In addition, the role of clergy as confessors was often of even greater

significance. Given their power to give or to withhold absolution, confessors often imposed moral limits on monarchs who otherwise could have acted with impunity. Indeed, the flow of pilgrims to the Holy Land was swelled by members of the nobility, acting on the demand of their confessors that they do this in order to obtain absolution for their serious misdeeds. Even some of the most brutal offenders went, some of them barefoot all the way. Thus, Fulk III, Count of Anjou (972–1040), a hot-

headed brute, was required to make four pilgrimages to Jerusalem, dying on the way home from the last. The point being that the Church very significantly limited the power of medieval monarchs. Indeed, Henry VIII could not get a divorce!

Those limits ended when monarchs became the head of state churches. Who now could tell Henry VIII he could not divorce? Who now could tell any German prince who headed his own Lutheran Church that he stood in mortal peril for his soul? In fact, Martin

Luther stressed that very fact, claiming ‘that secular government is an ordinance ordained by God and that the special rule claimed by the Roman Pontiff over things secular was an usurpation of the power committed by God to the secular authority’.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, ‘Luther’s political thought began with the assumption that God had given rulers their office and that rebellion against those divinely appointed rulers was tantamount to rebellion against God’.<sup>56</sup> No pope would have agreed.

Control of their state churches greatly increased the power of monarchs. Not only did it give them free access to churchly wealth, but they also could and did use the powers of the state on behalf of their churches. In Chapter 2 we will examine laws requiring acts of piety, including mandatory church attendance. The monarchs also exploited their position as head of the Church to inflate their legitimacy with claims of being semi-divine. In 1665, the Kingdom of Denmark-Norway adopted a written



of the Realm, a sort of parliamentary body. How's that for a 'limited' monarchy?

Twelve years earlier, the Diet of Brandenburg met for the last time and gave Frederick William, the Great Elector, power to raise taxes without its consent. Later in the century, King Charles XI of Sweden achieved 'absolute rule'. After the death of his son in 1718, parliamentary rule was instituted, but King Gustavus III seized all power back in 1771.

To sum up: three great myths about the

consequences of the Reformation have been exposed. The Reformation did not fill the pews or convert the masses to a coherent Christianity. The people continued to stay away from church in droves and held on to their mixture of Christian and pagan religious notions. Monarchs did not embrace a Reformation or remain steadfastly Catholic primarily for religious reasons, but out of self-interest. Henry VIII not only got his divorce; he also gained incredible wealth by looting the monasteries.

The same was true all across northern Europe, as kings and princes declared for Lutheranism and seized the wealth of the Church. In contrast, the King of France and the Holy Roman Emperor already had substantial control of the Church and shared in its wealth. Finally, the Reformations substantially increased the absolute power of monarchs by dispensing with their need to answer to the Church either as rulers or personally.

## 2: The misfortune of state churches, forced piety and bigotry

One might well suppose that, given their personal trials, leaders of the Reformations (aside from Henry VIII) would have agreed that the religious life requires freedom of thought – that religion is a matter of conscience and therefore requires policies of toleration. Certainly that is strongly implied in Martin Luther's famous conclusion of his testimony before the Diet of Worms:

‘I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other. So help me God. Amen.’

And early on Luther did support religious freedom, writing that the secular government must ‘allow people to believe what they . . . want, and they must use no coercion in this matter against anyone’.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Luther only felt this way while he was an excommunicated underdog. Once the Lutheran churches were secure, Luther, like most



published literature on the remarkably repressive character of the Lutheran state churches in northern Europe. Many books and essays on the history of the Scandinavian Lutheran churches, for example, hail the beginning of an era of limited ‘religious liberty’ in the nineteenth century, but offer no details about the utter lack of religious liberty in prior centuries; they don’t even mention that everyone was forced by law to attend church and take Communion.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, by consulting more than 20 books and



attempts to wish it all away.

In this chapter I shall try to fill these gaps, if only briefly.

## **Repressive state churches**

All three Reformations gave rise to state churches – monopoly institutions ruled by heads of state and sustained by laws that were enforced by civil authorities. In contrast, being unwilling to subordinate itself to control by the state, the Roman Catholic Church

was never in a position to attempt to legally force individual acts of piety and, perhaps, too sophisticated to attempt it. But that is precisely what the Reformation-based state churches tried to do. The masses were going to be devout, whether they liked it or not!

## **Lutheran state churches**

From the start, the German princes who supported Luther were not going to allow themselves to be exploited or commanded







belong to the state  
Lutheran Church:

The punishment for those who apostasized from the Lutheran faith . . . was exile and loss of the right to inheritance . . . The only group who were generally exempt from this law were foreign ambassadors . . . in 1624, two Swedish converts to Catholicism were put to death in Stockholm.<sup>8</sup>

But belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church was not enough.



certificate'<sup>11</sup> – an internal passport that was needed in order to move one's residence or even to travel within Sweden. In 1726, Sweden adopted the Conventicle Act which prohibited more than three people gathering for prayer or Bible study without a member of the Lutheran clergy being present – the point being to prevent any groups of religious dissenters from forming.<sup>12</sup>

In Norway and Denmark (which were a single kingdom in those days), things were much the same. It was impossible to



# Calvinist state churches

The attempts to use the law to force piety by the Lutheran state churches seem puny when compared with Calvin's Geneva.<sup>15</sup>

Attendance at Sunday morning services was mandatory. In addition, if there were sermons preached during the week (and usually there were several), attendance at these also was required by law. Being late to church was subject to a fine.

To speak disrespectfully of Calvin or the clergy was

a crime that could lead to imprisonment or banishing.

The colour and quantity of clothing were limited by law. There was a legal limit on the number of dishes it was permissible to serve at a meal. Gambling, card-playing, frequenting taverns (although there were none), singing indecent or irreligious songs were all prohibited.

‘Immodesty’ in dress was outlawed. A woman was jailed for arranging her hair at an ‘immoral height’.



limited success, as the continuing need to impose punishments attests.

In remarkable contrast, the Calvinists in the Dutch Republic opted for official policies of religious freedom and toleration – perhaps influenced by the commercial advantages of trading across Europe’s denominational lines. Lutherans and Anabaptists were welcome and so were Jews.

## **The Church of England**

In 1536 the first Act of Supremacy made Henry

VIII, and subsequent monarchs, supreme head of the Church of England. As had taken place throughout the Lutheran north, the creation of a state church soon led to the royal seizure of huge amounts of Catholic Church wealth and lands, especially with the Dissolution of the Monasteries. And as head of the Church, Henry VIII executed some Catholics, Lutherans, Anabaptists and various other religious dissenters. However, Henry made no effort to





orderly and . . . soberly during the time of common prayers, preachings, or other service of God . . . upon pain that every person so offending shall forfeit for every such offence twelve pence<sup>16</sup> . . . . [Twelve pence in 1559 amounted to about two weeks' wages for a skilled workman.]

This law was doubly repressive since it was meant not only to improve the very low rates of attendance (see Chapter 1), but to expose Catholic

recusants, since they could be expected to avoid non-Catholic services.

It probably is not surprising that this legal undertaking by the Church of England is ignored in the major historical works on the Reformations. After all, they also ignore the far more extensive attempts to coerce piety in the Lutheran nations. But it seems odd that this effort is also given short shrift in recent works on the history of the Church of England – Hervé Picton's excellent 2015 volume deals with



twenty in many towns go to any place of worship on the Lord's Day'.<sup>18</sup> Those few who were charged under the law usually pleaded that they were being unfairly charged since most others in the area were equally guilty. Thus, William Sorrell of Great Bardfield complained in 1599 that at the time he was accused, 'there was not above 20 or 40 people at church' out of more than 200 in the parish.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, on 4 April 1687, James II issued a Declaration of Indulgence:



the streets and fields (not to speake of eating and drinkeing)'.<sup>21</sup>

However, there was to be no 'indulgence' of Catholicism. Between 1559 and 1610, 'Parliament passed a series of harsh penal codes . . . that made it unlawful, and indeed treasonable, to engage in Catholic rites. Catholics could not hear a Mass, join a profession, hold office, own a weapon or come within 10 miles of London. Priests were banned from the country, and anyone harboring them could be condemned to death.'<sup>22</sup>

## **The modern legacy**

That the Reformations resulted in repressive state churches is not merely a misfortune of historical interest. The defects of state churches continue to be responsible for many of the current weaknesses of religion in Europe. In contrast with places such as the United States and sub-Saharan Africa, where extensive pluralism has created a marketplace filled with very aggressively competitive religious 'firms' with the result of





Scandinavian state churches.

There are Lutheran state churches in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway, and although the Church of Sweden lost its established position in 2006, the government continues to collect a religious tax on its behalf. The clergy of these state churches (including the Swedish Church) are civil servants, belong to trade unions, and have the right to strike. They are nearly impossible to fire. A priest in the Danish Church attracted international

attention when he published a book proclaiming his atheism. He was quoted in a national newspaper thus: 'God belongs in the past. He actually is so old fashioned that I am baffled by modern people believing in his existence. I am thoroughly fed up with empty words about miracles and eternal life.'<sup>25</sup> After a hearing, he was returned to his parish pulpit.

As clerical civil servants, the Lutheran clergy are not concerned about lack of attendance (it runs at 2 to 3



It was published in 1981, and even the most ardent supporters acknowledge that it contains ‘sweeping transformation[s] of accepted interpretations . . . In important ways, it must of necessity run against the grain of Bible traditions.’<sup>26</sup> Among other ‘corrections’, the new version omits the miracles. It was made the official Church of Sweden version by government fiat. Similarly, in Denmark, Parliament authorized female pastors in the state church without referring the matter to church

bishops.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, throughout Scandinavia government officials assert their full authority over the churches – which stand nearly empty everywhere.

The Church of England has, in recent times, been far less subject to state interference, although all measures adopted by the General Synod of the Church must be approved by both Houses of Parliament. However, as in Scandinavia, the Church of England clergy are unionized and recently forced the Church to rescind a rule defrocking



In any event, a recent study by two economists, based on surveys from 59 nations, found that the presence of state churches very substantially reduced rates of church attendance.<sup>29</sup>

## **Hatred and intolerance**

Christianity was born in hatred and intolerance. Romans made a sport of killing Christians in strange ways, and converts to the early Church had to survive two great and bloody persecution campaigns before the Emperor







In addition, there is the matter of anti-Semitism.

## **Reformations and the Jews**

The situation of Jews in Europe prior to the Reformations differed from place to place, but they always lived under the stigma of rejecting Jesus. Nevertheless, the more odious restrictions – such as being confined at night to ghettos, or even being expelled from a nation – were placed upon them by the state, not the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed,

the Church was a reliable barrier against anti-Jewish violence, as I reported at length in a previous book.<sup>31</sup> Forced conversions were condemned and the Church frequently took action to prevent and to punish attacks on Jews — clergy often risked their own lives to protect local Jews when anti-Semitic attacks broke out. This is attested again and again by medieval Jewish sources and by modern-day Jewish historians. As the distinguished Robert Chazan noted, despite being the objects of

suspicion and enduring many forms of discrimination, 'the essential fact remained [that it was official Church policy] that Jews were to be permitted to exist within Christian society and to fulfill their religious obligations as Jews'.<sup>32</sup>

The English Reformation had no consequences for the Jews because they had all been expelled from the country by Edward I in 1290, and only readmitted by Oliver Cromwell in 1655, although their residence in England wasn't legalized until 1829! In 1846 the law



# Luther's anti-Semitism and its consequences

In 2012, in his fine book *Martin Luther's Anti-Semitism*, the distinguished American scholar and Lutheran seminary professor Eric W. Gritsch (1931–2012) regretted that the

International Congress of Luther Research, meeting every four or five years since 1956, has dealt with almost every topic in lectures and seminars except with the

issue of ‘Luther and the Jews.’<sup>33</sup>

Gritsch also found it ‘astonishing that the icon of German historiography, Leopold von Ranke, wrote the classic work *German History in the Age of Reformation* without saying anything about Luther’s attitude to the Jews when [Ranke was] dealing with their persecution’!

Unlike some recent Lutheran writers who have attempted to soft-pedal Luther’s anti-Semitism, or at least to argue that it had



out by Eerdmans, a house long informally associated with the Dutch Reformed Church. That seems consistent with the lukewarm and hair-splitting reviews given the book by Lutheran writers – the book was mostly ignored in other quarters.

The response to Gritsch by Lutheran reviewers was fully in keeping with my encounter with Lutheran theologians when, at the start of my career, I did a major study of the effects of Christian faith on anti-Semitism, based on

opinion surveys of Americans.<sup>35</sup> As I worked on the project, I happened to read William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, and became aware, for the first time, of Martin Luther's anti-Semitism, when I read:

It is difficult to understand the behavior of most German Protestants in the first Nazi years unless one is aware of two things: their history and the influence of Martin Luther. The great founder of Protestantism

was both a passionate anti-Semite and a ferocious believer in absolute obedience to political authority. He wanted Germany rid of the Jews. Luther's advice was literally followed four centuries later by Hitler, Goering, and Himmler.<sup>36</sup>

Since, in connection with my anti-Semitism project, I had access to several prominent Lutheran theologians, I brought this to their attention. Each of them quickly reassured me that it was well known that

Shirer had exaggerated; that Luther's anti-Semitism was long forgotten and played no role in influencing modern opinions. I believed them. But they were at least wrong. Luther's anti-Semitism had a dreadful impact on European Jewry, both immediately and centuries later in Nazi Germany.

## ***On the Jews and Their Lies* by Martin Luther**

In his early days as a leader of the German



cousins, and brothers of the Lord . . .

If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them by the law of Christian love. We must receive them cordially . . . If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either.

By 1538, Luther had realized that the Jews were not going to convert. Thus, he wrote that ‘it is evident that he [God] has forsaken them, that they can no

longer be his people . . .’ Then, having brooded on the matter for another five years, Luther wrote a ‘little book so that I may be found among them who opposed such poisonous activities of the Jews and who warned Christians to be on their guard against them’. Thus did he introduce *On the Jews and Their Lies*.<sup>37</sup> It is as violently inflammatory as any anti-Semitic tract ever written.

The heart of the matter lies in Luther’s rhetorical question: ‘What shall we Christians do with this





them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow . . . But if we are afraid that they might harm us . . . then let us emulate the common sense of other nations . . . [and] eject them forever from the country.

Should you be tempted to sigh with relief that at least Luther stopped short of proposing a ‘final solution’, Luther noted that ‘[w]e are not at fault in slaying them’.

## Consequences

As I did the research needed to write this chapter I was stunned not only by the extent of the silence on the Nazi use of Luther's attacks on the Jews, but even more by the predominance of apologists among those who did acknowledge it. Again and again, I read that the Nazis were racial anti-Semites while Luther was 'merely' a religious anti-Semite.<sup>38</sup> James Kittleson (1941–2003) claimed that 'Luther never became an anti-Semite in the modern, racial sense of the term'.<sup>39</sup> The point being that Luther







on their side about the Jews. Perhaps even more important was the fact that leading Lutheran clerics confirmed and ratified the Nazi claims about Luther and about the Jews.

As for the Nazis, 1933 was the 450th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther, and in addition to the many celebrations held by the Lutheran churches, the Nazi Party held a number of celebrations too. At one of these celebrations, the prominent Nazi Erich Koch made a speech comparing Hitler and Luther, claiming

that the Nazis fought with Luther's spirit.<sup>40</sup> Soon after, the Nazis reprinted Luther's 'little book' on the Jews and gave it maximum publicity and circulation. They exhibited Luther's book in a glass case at all of the party's annual rallies in Nuremberg. With a great deal of fanfare and press coverage, the city of Nuremberg presented an original first edition of Luther's *On The Jews and Their Lies* to Julius Streicher, editor of the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer*, on his birthday in 1937.

Glowing with pride, Streicher said that Luther's work was the most radically anti-Semitic tract ever written. In 1940, Heinrich Himmler, soon to be the guiding force behind the 'final solution', wrote with admiration about 'what Luther said and wrote about the Jews. No judgment could be sharper'.<sup>41</sup>

As for the Lutheran clergy, from early days substantial numbers of Lutheran clergy were ardent supporters of Hitler and of his anti-Semitism. In 1933, soon after Hitler



issued a statement in support of the Nazi state policy that in public all Jews must wear a yellow badge, asserting that ‘since after his bitter experience Luther had suggested preventive measures against the Jews and their expulsion from German territory’.<sup>44</sup>

In his magisterial *The Reformation*, Diarmaid MacCulloch was quite correct that ‘Luther’s writing of 1543 is a blueprint for the Nazi’s *Kristallnacht* of 1938’,<sup>45</sup> when paramilitary Nazi forces smashed and burned









### 3: The misfortune of nationalistic states

This chapter does not mourn the collapse of Christendom, although it is hard not to be nostalgic for its many virtues, especially for the international character of the elite who ruled both its political and religious institutions. What this chapter mourns is the replacement of Christendom by powerful nation states, each with a distinctive and nationalistic culture. The Reformation played a

potent role in this transformation. First, by subjugating the Church to the state, thereby eliminating the internationalism of religion – this also happened in Catholic nations. Second, by stimulating the creation of divisive national cultures. Among the consequences were far more brutal and extensive wars.

## **Christendom**

Christendom slowly arose from the ashes of the Roman Empire and rested







cohesion, by the Church. This was Christendom.

## **On medieval warfare**

The most persistent and misleading myth about medieval European societies is that they lived in a state of constant, bloody warfare.<sup>3</sup> In truth, war was not so common and seldom bloody. For one thing, relatively small forces were involved – at the Battle of Hastings (in 1066), which resulted in the Norman conquest of England, about 10,000 Normans overcame about



at each level by warrior knights. The basis of this governing structure was to protect residents from bandits and raiders (such as the Vikings before they became Europeans). Of course, given warrior rule, conflicts – whether based on territorial disputes, greed or personal affronts – tended to take military form. Nevertheless, the successful rulers (be they kings, princes or merely local barons) ‘assiduously avoided battle’.<sup>4</sup> Although sometimes a war lasted for decades, ‘in many years there were no battles’.<sup>5</sup> As

Sir Charles Oman explained, ‘the main reason [for so] few engagements in the open field is that the weaker side was always tempted to take shelter behind its walls rather than to offer battle’.<sup>6</sup> In a sense, this was an Age of Castles, not an Age of Battles. Except, of course for the Crusades, which involved large forces of knights from many parts of Europe who marched several thousand miles to fight, and usually win, many pitched battles against far larger Muslim forces. As Mark Greengrass put it, the ‘Crusades

became Western Christendom's most ambitious project'.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Christendom Crusades**

On 27 November 1095, Pope Urban II mounted a platform set up in a meadow outside the French city of Clermont, surrounded in all directions by a huge crowd. A vigorous man of 53, Urban was blessed with an unusually powerful and expressive voice that made it possible for him to be heard at a great distance.

On this occasion, he gave the speech that launched the First Crusade.

Contrary to the views of recent Western apologists, the Crusades were not the start of European colonialism, meant to gain lands and loot from the Muslim Middle East. They were a defensive response to the latest in many centuries of Muslim attempts to colonize the West. Keep in mind that the Battle of Tours (in 732), wherein an army of Franks defeated a large Muslim force, was fought only about 120 miles south of

Paris. At that time Muslims already occupied Spain and southern Italy, having previously swept over all of Christian North Africa. Subsequently, they attempted repeatedly to invade Europe from the east – up through Greece and into Hungary. The First Crusade was organized in response to an appeal from the Emperor of Byzantium to send help to repel the Seljuk Turks, who had conquered Jerusalem and then driven to within 100 miles of Constantinople.

There were many reasons why the pope and Europe's nobility might have ignored a plea for help from Byzantium. For one thing, the Western cultural heritage and its Christianity were Roman, while the Byzantines were Greeks, whose lifestyle seemed decadent to Europeans and whose 'Orthodox' Christianity held Roman Catholicism in contempt — often persecuting its priests and practitioners. Nevertheless, Pope Urban thought it far more important to push back against Muslim

imperialism than to hold grudges against Byzantium. Moreover, he meant not only to come to the aid of Byzantium, but to go all the way and liberate Jerusalem, thus ending the newly arisen brutalization of Christian pilgrims. Therefore, he organized a huge Church council at Clermont and gave his famous speech, concluding: 'If you are conquered, you will have the glory of dying in the very same place as Jesus Christ, and God will never forget that he found you in the holy battalions.'<sup>8</sup> Now, shouts of '*Dieu le*





Eventually, five major armies of crusaders were enlisted under the leadership of five princes.

King Philip I of France wanted to lead a crusader army, but he could not, having been excommunicated for marrying another man's wife without either of them obtaining a divorce. So his brother Hugh, Count of Vermandois, raised an army of noble knights from the area around Paris and, joined by a large contingent of German knights, set out for

Constantinople in August 1096.

Godfrey of Bouillon (in what is today Belgium), who was also Duke of Lower Lorraine (a German-speaking state), sold most of his property to go crusading. He was accompanied by his brothers Eustace III and Baldwin of Boulogne, who took along his Norman wife, Godehilde of Toeni. This large army also left in August 1096.

Bohemond, Prince of Taranto, representing the Norman Kingdom of Italy and Sicily, organized and

led what may well have been the most fearsome force of them all, made up entirely of Norman veterans of many campaigns. They sailed from Bari in October and landed on the Bulgarian coast, marching from there to Constantinople.

The fourth army of crusaders was recruited and led by Raymond IV of Toulouse in south-western France. He also departed in October at the head of a force that included some Spanish knights – he was accompanied by his third wife who was the daughter

of King Alfonso VI of Castile.

Finally, Robert, Duke of Normandy, was the eldest son of William the Conqueror who had been disowned by his father for plotting against him with the King of France. To obtain the funds needed to raise and sustain a crusader army, Robert mortgaged Normandy to his brother King William of England. The duke's forces were made up of knights from England and Scotland as well as from Normandy (plus a few from Denmark) and also included his

cousin, Robert II, Count of Flanders, and his brother-in-law Stephen, Count of Blois.

The Second Crusade took place about 50 years after the First and was equally international in its make-up. King Louis VII of France joined forces with the German King Conrad III, thereby uniting the two most powerful monarchies in Europe. The Third Crusade was led by the King of England, known as Richard the Lionheart, by King Philip II of France, and by Frederick I

(Frederick Barbarossa),  
King of Germany and Italy.

Clearly, the Crusades  
demonstrated that  
Christendom was a reality.  
Despite their various  
internal wars, the  
European elite saw  
themselves as members of  
a community.

## **Intellectual life**

But Christendom was not  
merely a community of  
warriors or even a  
community of the nobility.  
It was a civilization!  
Unfortunately, for  
generations everyone was

taught that the era beginning with the fall of Rome and ending not long before the Reformations was correctly known as the 'Dark Ages'. Nonsense. This was an era of remarkable progress in technology, high culture and even in morality – so much so that when Columbus sailed, 25 years before Luther nailed up his theses, Europe was far ahead of the rest of the world. I have written on this at great length elsewhere. It is unnecessary here to discuss the immense technological



music, the simultaneous sounding of two or more musical lines – hence harmonies, dates from as early as the ninth century (the Greeks and Romans had only monophonic music). And an adequate system of written musical notation was developed by the tenth century. This meant that musicians could play music without having first heard it played and that compositions could last across the generations and spread easily from place to place. Thus, in medieval times, as later, music was entirely

international – the elites all across Europe enjoyed the same music. They heard it in church and at concerts given for the nobility at court.

The magnificent ‘Gothic’ cathedrals that exist all across Europe – from Scandinavia to Portugal, from England to Poland – also testify to the unity of Christendom. Of course, they were not built by the barbarous Goths – that label was imposed on them by snobs during the so-called Enlightenment, who scorned these buildings for not conforming to ‘the









amazingly often. Then, as today, one gained fame and invitations to join other faculties by *innovation*. It was not who knew Aristotle word for word, but who had found errors in Aristotle. Thus, from the start, some university faculty devoted themselves to the pursuit of new knowledge, thereby launching the rise of science as will be discussed at length in Chapter 5. The university also provided an institutional base for the pursuit of theology – the University of Paris was home to Thomas Aquinas



For Europe's elites, 'the Reformation replaced loyalty to Christendom with loyalty to "nation", and it also replaced Christian identity with national identity'.<sup>13</sup> In doing so, the Reformations 'dissolved much of the intellectual and moral cement which had long held Europeans together'.<sup>14</sup> From this came the nationalistic state filled with patriotic citizens, ready to fight for their nation's destiny.

We already have seen in Chapters 1 and 2 that the Reformations led to the



locals, both culturally and politically.

## **Building national cultures**

In a sense, national cultures long predated the Reformations, lying underneath the international layer of the elite culture of Christendom. ‘Across the landmass of western Europe . . . lay thousands of villages and parishes, their inhabitants . . . suspicious . . . towards the cosmopolitan ambitions and bureaucracy of the

international order.’<sup>15</sup> And the cultures that prevailed in these places were local as to customs, outlook and especially language. With the breakdown of Christendom, the political elite in each nation became increasingly localized in all these aspects. Indeed, this localization was speeded and empowered by the Reformations, especially in terms of language.

When Luther was born, very few Europeans other than some monks, nuns and clergy were literate, mainly because there was almost nothing to read in











Cervantes. Of major importance were localized histories that stressed the unique heritage and external conflicts of the nation's past — some actual, some of them fanciful. For example, in England stories of the (perhaps) fictional King Arthur combined with the remarkable exploits of the real Richard the Lionheart to help produce a national literary heritage. In France, the story of Jeanne d'Arc, how she had rallied the French forces and then died a martyr's death at the hands of the hated English,



The creation of distinctive national cultures was reinforced by the nationalization of university life. In the wake of the Reformations and the publishing explosion, universities ceased to teach in Latin. Now, to study at Paris, students needed to speak and read French and should they wish to transfer to Cambridge they had to know English as well. The same was true for faculty. Soon, universities began to celebrate their different national cultures and to stress the glory of their national histories.

This was greatly encouraged by policies of exclusion. Thus, in Scandinavia no one could enter a nation, let alone enrol at a local university, unless one belonged to the state church. Only members in good standing of the Church of England could enrol in Oxford or Cambridge. Only Catholics could attend the University of Paris. And so it went.

The major consequence of all this was the creation of distinctive national cultures that were embraced at all levels of society. That is, the upper-

class as well as the lower-class French became distinctively French and noticeably different from the upper- and lower-class English or Germans. Moreover, most people in each of these nations were fully aware of these differences and proud of them, regarding their culture as superior to all others.

## **The rise of nationalism**

‘Nationalism’ has become a much overused term, subject to far too many and often muddled

definitions.<sup>21</sup> But it is the best word for identifying one of the central facts of modern life, having to do with the bond between individuals and their community of residence. I will give little attention to the form of nationalism exhibited by members of an internal minority wishing to possess their own state, such as the Basques within Spain. I will attend to nationalism involving nations wishing to form independent states, but my main focus will be on the form of nationalism that involves *patriotism*,



Obviously, then, some nations are not states. A nation state is both – a political unit whose residents share a common culture. Historically, England was long a nation state and Scotland has been one from time to time. In any event, the nationalism I wish to examine consists of the patriotism generated by the nation state or by a nation that becomes a nation state.

How, then, did nationalism arise?

The first step was the existence of multiple states

in proximity and with distinctive cultures. States existed within Christendom, but they were ruled by elites having an interstate culture. The Reformations shattered that culture. The formation of state churches greatly facilitated the development of distinctive local cultures – everyone was, or was supposed to be, of the same religion. The development of national cultures was encouraged by the linguistic and ‘ethnic’ homogeneity of these states. In part this was a function of the ‘tribal’

past of Europe and in part it was a result of exclusion and/or repression. That is, Europe was peopled by descendants of a whole host of ethnic settlers and invaders – Anglo-Saxons, Goths, Franks, Huns and the like. These groups had settled in specific places and retained important aspects of their original cultures, especially language – although some shifted to a language that was, in effect, a rather simplified form of Latin (the so-called Romance languages of French, Spanish and Italian). The



produced an effective homogeneity. England repressed Catholics into virtual invisibility and submerged Scottish and Welsh influences. As will be seen, many culturally homogeneous European nation states came into being during the nineteenth century through wars of independence.

Another factor was that the nation states of Europe are closely packed. France borders Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Spain and is less than 30 miles across the Channel from England. Such

proximity not only has been a constant source of conflict over borders, but has encouraged the more powerful nation states to attempt to incorporate the weaker ones. Proximity also exacerbated cultural conflicts and contempt, in that neighbours have been very aware of cultural differences and insults. Thus, as early as 1577 William Harrison's *Description of England* set a new tone 'in which the liberties and noble character of the English nation were contrasted with the dissolute and



centuries, some within nation states, others as nations within states. Then came two major developments. First was the French Revolution. Second, the nineteenth century was marked by wars of independence, many of which failed, but some established new nation states, all of their citizens brimming with nationalistic fervour.

The French Revolution was a mass movement against the ruling elite. In January 1793, King Louis XVI was beheaded, soon to be followed by 16,594





independence. Norway broke away from Sweden in 1905, Bulgarians gained their freedom in 1908, and Albania became independent in 1912.

This wave of nation-state creation was in tune with the remarkable artistic era known as Romanticism, which celebrated heroic nationalism. Musicians, writers, artists and even philosophers drew upon national folklore to idealize their nation's cultural heritage. Thus, the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) claimed that every historical era is



therefore the Jews in Germany could not really appreciate German music. Wagner's music was beloved by Hitler.

## **Nationalism and conflict**

Unlike most who write on the subject, I do not find nationalism deplorable. Neither do I find it on the wane — the recent opposition to the European Union that has burst forth in many nations (such as the recent British exit) surely suggests that local majorities resent and reject

the attempt to submerge national independence beneath a continental bureaucracy. There is nothing inherently wicked or ignorant about nationalism – about pride in one's culture and history and a preference for one's way of life.<sup>23</sup> That said, the fact remains that nationalism can generate and worsen conflicts between nations – and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it did so.

It all began with the French Revolution. Prior to that, in the seventeenth

and eighteenth centuries European warfare had involved very small professional armies, fighting very circumscribed campaigns having almost no impact on civilian life. In 1643, the entire Prussian army consisted of 5,500 professional soldiers. A century later the fierce Prussian army commanded by Frederick the Great numbered only 90,000 and still triumphed in the Seven Years War (1756–63) against France, Austria and Russia.

Then, in 1792, the National Convention of the





professionals who fought with restraint and caution. Now they consisted of relatively naive and youthful masses, expected to do their duty as defined by the state.

Of course, casualties soared. The number killed in one battle often far exceeded the total number of troops involved in an entire war a century earlier – the French lost nearly 30,000 men, including 49 generals, when they *won* the Battle of Borodino, 75 miles from Moscow! All told, Napoleon probably

lost 400,000 men in his effort to defeat Russia.

Only highly nationalistic states could successfully impose mandatory conscription on their populations. Only highly nationalistic cultures could make people willing to die for their country. Consequently, nationalism was a major factor in the catastrophic wars of the twentieth century.<sup>26</sup>

## **The First World War: 1914–1918**

The proximate cause of the war was Serbian

nationalism. Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist on 28 June 1914. Anti-Serbian riots led to a declaration of war on Serbia by Austria-Hungary, and Europe's major powers joined in based on their treaty obligations.

That nationalism played a major role in causing and sustaining what became the most devastating European war up to that time is revealed by the joyful crowds that celebrated its beginning.

‘In the capitals of the belligerent powers people danced in the streets and garlanded the departing troops with flowers . . .’<sup>27</sup>

There is a famous picture of 25-year-old Adolf Hitler in a Munich crowd cheering the start of the war (he later served with distinction in the German army). As Ernst Jünger recalled: ‘We were enraptured by the war. We had set out in a rain of flowers, in a drunken atmosphere of blood and roses.’<sup>28</sup>

Then, to fully ratify their absolute commitment to their nations, Europeans engaged in an orgy of nationalistic name changing. In Germany, the Hotel Westminster became the Hotel Lindendorf, and the Café Piccadilly was changed to Café Vaterland. In Paris, the Rue d'Allemagne became the Rue Jean Jaurès. The British royal family changed its name from the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha to the House of Windsor, the noble Battenbergs became the

Mountbattens, and many other British families with German-sounding names changed them too. The breed of dogs known as the German Shepherd was changed to the Alsatian by the English Kennel Club (it was changed back in 1977), and after they entered the war, Americans renamed Dachshunds as Liberty Pups. The city of Berlin, in Ontario, Canada changed its name to Kitchener, after the famous British general Lord Kitchener. In Chicago, Lubeck, Frankfort and Hamburg streets were renamed Dickens,

Charleston and  
Shakespeare. And  
Americans stopped  
referring to Sauerkraut,  
instead calling it Liberty  
Cabbage. As Hagen Schulze  
noted: ‘Bizarre details of  
this kind may seem trivial,  
but they indicate a degree  
of national fervour such as  
had never been known in  
previous wars.’<sup>29</sup>

It also was war on a scale  
that had never been known  
before. In the whole of  
Europe, only four nations,  
Denmark, Luxembourg,  
Norway and Sweden,  
stayed out. Beyond Europe,  
Australia, Canada, India,



nationalism was not only undiminished, but greatly exacerbated. Early on this was manifested in two important ways. First, the peace treaty imposed staggering 'reparations' upon the defeated nations, creating deep feelings of grievance and hatred that played a very substantial role in causing a resumption of war a generation later. Second, the doctrine of self-determination imposed on the defeated nations (particularly through the urging of the American president) used local

nationalistic sentiments to justify stripping away many former European provinces from the losers by making them independent states: Albania, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – and the relatively small nation of Austria – was all that was left from the dismembered Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The desire to reclaim some of these lost areas played an important role in causing the Second World War. Worse yet, the economic suffering not





and many of whom seemed ready for war.

## **The Second World War: 1939–1945**

There was no dancing in the streets at the outbreak of the Second World War, when Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. But nationalism remained a major factor. Playing on German grievances vis-à-vis the First World War peace treaty, Hitler had risen to power with promises to restore national honour and regain lost territories,

but above all with his celebration of the supreme national character of Germany. Keep in mind that 'Nazi' is an acronym for National Socialist, and Hitler redefined the concept of German nationality to the level of race – authentic Germans belonged to the Aryan or Nordic 'master race', with a biological right to rule. It was relatively easy for Hitler to make these claims given the existing 'fantastic idealization of the German character, of the virtues, language, the culture and the achievement of



widespread in England at the time, and Franklin D. Roosevelt refused to let boatloads of Jews attempting to escape from Europe land in the United States. Nor should we forget that the Jews in France were not rounded up and shipped off to the death camps by Germans – that was done by the French police.

In the end, the Second World War made the First World War seem like a minor engagement. Military deaths totalled about 21 million and, with the massive bombing of



## 4: The myth of the Protestant Ethic

A glance at the occupational statistics of any country of mixed religious composition brings to light with remarkable frequency . . . the fact that business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the higher grades of skilled labour, and even more the higher technically and commercially trained personnel of modern enterprises, are



was that industrial capitalism originated, and tended to flourish, only in Protestant areas or nations. His answer: because Protestantism caused people to work hard and live frugally. Weber identified this as the 'Protestant Ethic'.

Weber claimed that industrial capitalism required more than greed and the desire to increase one's wealth – these are universal human traits. Rather, what was special about industrial capitalism was that it required people to combine their efforts to

gain wealth with frugality and this allowed them to reinvest the maximum amount of their profits in order to acquire ever greater wealth. Weber called this the 'Spirit of Capitalism'. He then asked, how did the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism come to be linked?

The first step, according to Weber, was Luther's designation of work as a divine calling: as 'a task set by God . . . The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic

asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling.’<sup>1</sup> Weber went on to note that ‘this moral justification of worldly activity was one of the most important results of the Reformation, especially of Luther’s part in it’. Moreover, this conception of work does not exist among ‘Catholic peoples nor those of classical antiquity . . . while [it is found among] all predominantly Protestant peoples’.<sup>2</sup>

By itself, however, to regard work as a divine calling probably would not have been sufficient to produce capitalism. In addition, it was necessary that people pursue their calling with extreme effort. To explain this level of motivation, Weber turned to Calvinism and the notion of divine election. While Lutherans and Catholics disagree as to how one earns salvation – through faith alone or through faith and works – Calvin taught that one can do nothing whatever to gain salvation. According

to Calvin's doctrine of predestination, God determines that some are elect (saved) and most people are damned on a basis known only to God, and that's it. Nothing one can do in this life changes one's fate.

Weber proposed that 'the decisive problem is: How was this doctrine borne?' How could people live with this uncertainty as to their unchangeable fate? As he put it: 'The question, Am I one of the elect? must sooner or later have arisen for every believer and forced all other interests

into the background.’<sup>3</sup> To this, Calvinism proposed two responses. First, ‘it is held to be an absolute duty to consider oneself chosen, and to combat all doubts as temptations of the devil, since lack of self-confidence is the result of insufficient faith’.<sup>4</sup> But it was the second response that Weber regarded as the basis for capitalism: ‘to attain certainty in one’s own election and justification in the daily struggle of life’<sup>5</sup> by achieving worldly success. That is, ‘faith had to be proved by its objective

results'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, 'the God of Calvinism demanded of his believers not single good works, but a life of good works'.<sup>7</sup> Hence, 'now every Christian had to be a monk all his life [but to do so] within mundane occupations. But . . . Calvinism added something positive to this, the idea of the necessity of proving one's faith in worldly activity.'<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the need to be reassured that one was saved, and to demonstrate that fact to others, required dedication to achieving maximum worldly success.









there was nothing that needed to be explained.

## **Contrary evidence**

There is by now such a mountain of published research (supposedly) based on Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis that it would take many weeks to locate most of it, let alone read it. Fortunately, most of it has little or no relevance to Weber's actual thesis and is so silly (comparing Protestant and Catholic student grades in accounting courses) and/or tendentious (does the





capitalism. Of course, Rachfahl weakened his case against Weber's thesis by agreeing that Protestantism far exceeded Catholicism in terms of having a higher standard of morality. Next came another German economist, Lujo Brentano (1844–1931), who correctly noted that industrial capitalism originated in southern Europe long before the German Reformation and was taken north mainly by Catholic banking firms.

Then came the British economic historian R. H.

Tawney (1880–1962) whose fine book *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926) reiterated in far greater detail that industrial capitalism began in the Catholic cities of southern Europe and that even when capitalism appeared in the north, it was at first controlled by Catholic bankers from the south. Tawney added an additional twist by suggesting that ‘nascent capitalism . . . [shaped] Calvinism’s attitude to enterprise and the accumulation of wealth, not *vice versa*’.<sup>14</sup>

In 1933, another British historian, H. M. Robertson (1905–84), again demonstrated that the rise of capitalism long preceded the Reformations, being of Catholic origin. As for the Protestant Ethic, it was produced by an already capitalistic-minded middle class. There were more such rejections of Weber during the 1940s and early 1950s and then came a major study: Kurt Samuelsson (1921–2005) published *Religion and Economic Action: The Protestant Ethic, the Rise of Capitalism, and the*

*Abuses of Scholarship* in Swedish in 1957 and an English translation appeared in 1961. In his review of the book, the great Harvard sociologist George C. Homans (1910–89) put it this way: Samuelsson does not ‘just tinker with Weber’s hypothesis, but leaves it in ruins’.<sup>15</sup> Samuelsson recited once again the wealth of evidence that the rise of industrial capitalism preceded the Reformations.

But Weber’s thesis lived on in the textbooks and in a continuing flow of trivial



have not managed to get rid of it once and for all. Yet it is clearly false. The northern countries took over the place that earlier had been so long and brilliantly occupied by the old capitalist centers of the Mediterranean. They invented nothing, either in technology or business management.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1998 the members of the International Sociological Association voted Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* the

fourth most important sociological book of the twentieth century. Many of us were shocked by the announcement and forced to wonder when and if sociology would ever become an empirical science. The announcement also prompted Jacques Delacroix and François Nielsen, two American sociologists born in Europe, to undertake a study to demonstrate with historical statistics that the Protestant Ethic thesis is, as they put it, merely a 'beloved academic myth'.<sup>18</sup>

The first task these scholars faced was to assemble data on the extent of industrial capitalism in the nations of Europe at as early a date as possible. Eventually they obtained data for Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. For each nation they determined the percentage of Protestants in the population at the middle of the nineteenth century. Then they located a

number of measures of industrial development such as the percentage of the male labour force employed in industry and the extension of the railway networks. They also located financial measures such as wealth per capita, savings bank deposits per capita, and the year of founding of the principal stock exchange. Then they calculated the relationship between Protestantism and these measures of industrial capitalism. The results were zero: Catholic and Protestant nations did not differ!

Subsequently, a study published in 2011, using GDP per capita as well as growth of GDP per capita from as far back as 1500 for the 15 major European nations, found no significant correlation between Protestantism and the rise of industrial capitalism.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Davide Cantoni at Harvard managed to assemble data on growth from 1300 to 1900 for 272 German cities. After analysing the data he reported that Protestantism had no impact on economic growth.<sup>20</sup> So much, then,

for the fourth best sociological book of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, Weber wasn't entirely wrong. Religion did play a major role in the rise of capitalism. But, rather than being based on a Protestant Ethic, capitalism was a very Catholic invention: it first appeared in the great monastic estates, way back in the ninth century.

## **Monasticism and capitalism\***

The Bible often condemns greed and wealth – 'For the









characteristics of capitalism itself'.<sup>23</sup> Collins referred to this as 'religious capitalism',<sup>24</sup> adding that the 'dynamism of the medieval economy was primarily that of the Church'.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the medieval era, the Church was by far the largest landowner in Europe and its liquid assets and annual income far surpassed not only that of the wealthiest king, but probably that of all of Europe's nobility added together.<sup>26</sup> A substantial portion of this wealth flowed into the coffers of

the religious orders, much of it in payments and endowments in return for liturgical services – Henry VII of England paid to have 10,000 masses said for his soul.<sup>27</sup> In addition to receiving many gifts of land, most orders reinvested wealth in buying or reclaiming more land, thus initiating an era of rapid growth which often resulted in extensive property holdings scattered over a large area. Although dwarfed by the huge monastic centre at Cluny, which may have had a thousand priories by the

eleventh century, many monastic orders had established 50 or more outposts.<sup>28</sup> In the twelfth century, under the leadership of St Bernard of Clairvaux, the Cistercians protested against the extravagance of Cluny, but being well-organized and frugal they quickly amassed some of the largest estates in Europe – many Cistercian houses farmed 100,000 acres and one in Hungary had fields totalling 250,000 acres.<sup>29</sup> In addition to gifts, much of this growth was achieved by incorporating previously

untilled tracts as well as by clearing forests and draining submerged areas. For example, monks at the monastery of Les Dunes recovered about 25,000 acres of fertile fields from the marshes along the Flanders coast.<sup>30</sup>

This period of great expansion was motivated in part by population growth,<sup>31</sup> and in even greater part by increases in productivity. Until this era the estates were largely self-sufficient – they produced their own food, drink and fuel, they made their own cloth and tanned













self-sufficient, subsistence operations. Moreover, they were so unproductive that a wealthy family required huge estates in order to live in style. But, even in its earliest stages, capitalism brought immense wealth to orders having only modest fields and flocks.

The third development was *credit*. Barter does not lend itself to credit – to conclude a trade by agreeing to a future payment of 300 chickens can easily be disputed as to the value of the owed poultry: are these to be old hens, roosters or pullets?



Countess of Flanders and subsequently lent 1,300 marks of silver and 3 marks of gold to the Duke of Lower Lorraine. In 1044 the Bishop of Worms lent 20 pounds of gold and a large (unspecified) amount of silver to Emperor Henry III. There were many similar instances – according to surviving records, in this era bishops and monasteries were the usual source of loans to the nobility.<sup>37</sup> By the thirteenth century, monastic lending often took the form of a *mort-gage* (literally, ‘dead pledge’), wherein the

borrower pledged land as security and the lender collected all income from that land during the term of the loan and did not deduct this income from the amount owed. This practice often resulted in additions to the monastery's lands because the monks were not hesitant to foreclose.<sup>38</sup>

But the monks did more than invest in land or lend from their bursting treasuries. They began to leave their fields, vines and barns, and retire into liturgical 'work', conducting endless paid

masses for souls in purgatory and for living benefactors who wished to improve their fates in the next world. Monks now enjoyed leisure and luxury. The monks at Cluny 'were given plentiful and choice foods. Their wardrobe was renewed annually. The manual labor prescribed by the rule [of St Benedict] was reduced to entirely symbolic tasks about the kitchen. The monks lived like lords.'<sup>39</sup> It was the same in the other great houses. And all of this was possible because the great monasteries began to

utilize a *hired labour force*, who not only were more productive than the monks had been,<sup>40</sup> but also more productive than tenants required to provide periods of compulsory labour. Indeed, these tenants had long since been satisfying their labour obligations by money payments.<sup>41</sup> Thus, as 'religious capitalism' unfolded, monks still faithfully performed their duties, but aside from those engaged in liturgy, the rest now 'worked' as executives and foremen. In this way, the medieval monasteries came to

resemble remarkably  
'modern' firms – well  
administered and quick to  
adopt the latest  
technological advances.<sup>42</sup>

## **The virtues of work and frugality**

Traditional societies  
celebrate consumption  
while holding work in  
contempt. This is true not  
only of the privileged elite,  
but even of those whose  
days are spent in toil.  
Notions such as the  
'dignity' of labour or the  
idea that work is a virtuous  
activity were

incomprehensible in ancient Rome or in any other pre-capitalist society. Rather, just as spending is the purpose of wealth, the preferred approach to work is to have someone else do it, and, failing that, to do as little as possible. In China the mandarins grew their fingernails as long as they could (even wearing silver sheaths to protect them from breaking), in order to make it evident that they did no labour. Consequently, capitalism seems to require and to encourage a remarkably different attitude towards

work – to see it as intrinsically virtuous and also to recognize the virtue of restricting one's consumption. Of course, Max Weber identified this as the Protestant Ethic, so-called because he believed it to be absent from Catholic culture. But Weber was wrong.

Belief in the virtues of work and of simple living did accompany the rise of capitalism, but this was centuries before Martin Luther was born. Despite the fact that many, perhaps even most, monks and nuns were from the

nobility and wealthiest families,<sup>43</sup> they honoured work not only in theological terms, but by actually doing it. In Randall Collins' words, they 'had the Protestant ethic without Protestantism'.<sup>44</sup>

The virtue of work was made evident in the sixth century by St Benedict, who wrote in his famous *Rule*: 'Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as prayerful reading . . . When they live by the



specialize in meditation and live by charity, medieval Christian monastics lived by their own labour, sustaining highly productive estates. This not only prevented 'ascetic zeal from becoming petrified in world flight',<sup>47</sup> but sustained a healthy concern with economic affairs. Although the 'Protestant Ethic' thesis is wrong, it is entirely legitimate to link capitalism to a 'Christian Ethic'.

Thus it was that, beginning in about the ninth century, the growing

monastic estates came to resemble well-organized and stable firms that pursued complex commercial activities within a relatively free market, investing in productive activities involving a hired workforce, guided by anticipated and actual returns. If this was not capitalism in all its glory, it was certainly close enough. Moreover, these economic activities of the great religious orders made Christian theologians think anew about their doctrines concerning profits and

interest. Granted that Augustine had approved profits. But are there no moral limits to profit margins? As for usury, the Bible condemns it; but if interest is forbidden how can one buy on credit or borrow needed funds?

## **Capitalism and theological progress**

Christian theology has never crystallized. If God intends that Scripture will be more adequately grasped as humans gain greater knowledge and experience, this warrants

continuing reappraisal of doctrines and interpretations. And so it was.

## **Initial Christian opposition to interest and profits**

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Catholic theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, declared that profits were morally legitimate and, while giving lip service to the long tradition of opposition to 'usury', these same theologians justified interest charges. In this









pope until he had negotiated a new agreement under which he ended up repaying 50 per cent interest over the course of eight years.<sup>49</sup> The need for loans often was so great and so widespread that Italian banks opened branches all across the Continent. Although many bishops, monastic orders and even the Roman hierarchy ignored the ban on usury, opposition to interest lingered. As late as the Second Lateran Council in 1139, the Church 'declared the unrepentant usurer condemned by the

Old and New Testaments alike and, therefore, unworthy of ecclesiastical consolations and Christian burial'.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, documents prove 'that in 1215 there were usurers at the Papal Court from which a needy prelate could obtain a loan'.<sup>51</sup>

As many of the great Christian monastic orders continued to maximize profits and to lend money at whatever rate of interest the market would bear, they were increasingly subjected to a barrage of condemnations from more traditional clergy who

accused them of the sin of avarice. What was to be done?

## **Theology of the ‘just price’ and of legitimate interest**

Obviously, people can't be expected to simply give away the products of their labour. But is there no limit to what they should charge? How can we be sure that an asking price is not sinfully high?

Writing in the thirteenth century, St Albertus Magnus proposed that the ‘just price’ is simply what

‘goods are worth according to the estimation of the market at the time of sale’.<sup>52</sup> That is, a price is just if that’s what uncoerced buyers are willing to pay. Adam Smith could not have found fault with this definition. Echoing his teacher, but using many more words, St Thomas Aquinas began his analysis of just prices by posing the question ‘Whether a man may lawfully sell a thing for more than it is worth’.<sup>53</sup> He answered by first quoting Augustine that it is natural and lawful, for ‘you wish to







charges were not usurious.<sup>55</sup> For example, if a productive property such as an estate is given as security for a loan, the lender may take all of the production during the period of the loan and not deduct it from the amount owed.<sup>56</sup> Many other exclusions involved the ‘costs’ to the lender of not having the money available for other commercial opportunities such as buying goods for resale, or acquiring new fields. Since these alternative opportunities for profit are entirely licit, it is licit to





debated the primary aspects of emerging capitalism – profits, property rights, credit, lending and the like. As Lester K. Little summed up: ‘In each case they came up with generally favorable, approving views, in sharp contrast to the attitudes that had prevailed for six or seven centuries right up to the previous generation.’<sup>60</sup> Capitalism was fully and finally freed from all fetters of faith.<sup>61</sup>

It was a remarkable shift. These were, after all, theologians who had separated themselves from

the world. Most of them had taken vows of poverty. Most of their predecessors had held merchants and commercial activities in contempt. Had asceticism truly prevailed in the religious orders, it seems most unlikely that Christian disdain for and opposition to commerce would have mellowed, let alone have been radically transformed. This theological revolution was the result of direct experience with worldly imperatives. For all their genuine acts of charity, monastic administrators





spawning many heretical mass sect movements, and culminating in the Reformation. But these worldly aspects of the Church paid serious dividends in the development of capitalism. The Church didn't stand in the way – rather it both justified and took an active role in the Commercial Revolution of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>63</sup>

## **Italian city states**

Although capitalism developed in the great monastic estates, it soon

found a very receptive setting in the newly democratic Italian city states. In the tenth century they rapidly began to emerge as the banking and trading centres of Europe, exporting a stream of goods purchased from suppliers in northern Europe, especially in Flanders, Holland and England, their primary customers being Byzantium and the Islamic states, especially those along the coast of North Africa. Subsequently, the Italian city states industrialized and soon



perfection of banking. The Italian bankers quickly developed and adopted double-entry bookkeeping. To facilitate long-distance trade, Italian banks invented bills of exchange, making it possible to transfer funds on paper rather than undertake the difficult and very dangerous practice of transporting coins or precious metal from a bank in Florence to one in Genoa, let alone from a trading company in Venice to a woollens dealer in England. Italian bankers also initiated insurance to

guard against loss of long-distance shipments by land or sea. Perhaps the most important of all the Italian banking innovations was the perfection of modern arithmetic, based on the adoption of Hindu–Arabic numerals and the concept of zero. Even addition and subtraction were daunting chores for Romans, given their cumbersome numeral system. The new system was revolutionary in terms of its ease and accuracy, and arithmetic schools soon sprang up in all the leading northern Italian city states, eventually even



branches in England and nearly as many in Ireland. In fact, until well into the fifteenth century every bank in western Europe was either in Italy or was a branch of an Italian bank.<sup>66</sup>

The proximate cause of the rise of Italian capitalism was freedom from the rapacious rulers who repressed and consumed economic progress in most of the world, including most of Europe. Although their political life often was turbulent, these city states were true republics able to sustain the freedom



And that's how capitalism arose in Western civilization. What Weber's famous thesis really represented was not research, but Protestant presumption. The arrogant claim that Protestantism freed Western civilization from the grip of a backward Catholic monolith not only prompted Weber (and probably explains why his thesis cannot be purged from the textbooks); it also spawned other presumptuous myths, several of which will be dispatched in Chapters 5 and 6.



## 5: The myth of the Protestant scientific 'revolution'

In 1676, Isaac Newton famously remarked, 'If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.' Unfortunately, too few who quote this line realize that not only was Newton quite serious, he was quite correct. Science did not suddenly erupt in a great intellectual revolution during Newton's time; this era of superb achievements was the culmination of centuries of

sustained, normal scientific progress that began as early as the thirteenth century in Europe's newly invented universities. After all, Newton's First Law of Motion<sup>1</sup> was anticipated by Oxford's William of Ockham (1285–1349) with his insight that once a body is in motion, it will remain so unless some force, such as friction, acts upon it. This was further refined by the University of Paris professor Jean Buridan (1300–58) who developed the principle of *inertia* – that unless acted upon by an external force, bodies at

rest will stay at rest and bodies in motion will stay in motion. Of course, Newton's First Law was merely the starting point for his magnificent system of physics, but, contrary to claims made on his behalf by the philosophers of the so-called 'Enlightenment', Newton didn't have to start from scratch. Rather, the glorious scientific breakthroughs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were based on the work of a long line of natural philosopher 'giants'. Consequently, I prefer to identify this great

era of scientific discovery as the 'coming of age' of Western science rather than as a revolution, since there was no sudden break with the past.

Nevertheless, the notion that a scientific revolution erupted in the sixteenth century is so ingrained in our intellectual culture that Steven Shapin began his recent study with the charming line: 'There was no such thing as the Scientific Revolution, and this is a book about it.'<sup>2</sup> But, even if it proves to be impossible to lay this myth of revolution to rest, it

must be possible to quash the second, far more troublesome myth: that the scientific revolution was accomplished by Protestants, Catholics lacking the necessary motivation and intellectual freedom. This myth is a close cousin of Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis and it too originated in the twentieth century. In what follows I will recount how this myth originated. Then, I will present conclusive evidence that it is false.

## **‘Protestant’ science**









paragraph above, Merton shifted his discussion to 'the Puritan ethic'. As he put it: 'It was precisely Puritanism which built a new bridge between the transcendental and human action, thus supplying a motive force for the new science.'<sup>4</sup>

In support of this thesis, Merton sifted through the biographies of various English scientists to provide examples. He also gave some attention to the European continent where he confidently 'discovered' that 'even in the predominantly Catholic









of the religion of individual scientists would be necessary.

Moreover, even had Merton used an adequate definition of 'Puritan', his thesis still would suffer from his reliance on an unsystematic selection of examples. This flaw often vitiates historical studies, but it need not. Often it is possible to assemble data on an appropriate set of cases. And in this instance, I have done so.

First, I created a list of *all* the scientific 'stars' of the era beginning with the publication of Copernicus's





or not he had served on a university faculty, and his social class origins: nobility, gentry, bourgeois or lower – these categories will be explained later.

### *English*

<b>Barrow,</b>	Mathematics,
<b>Isaac</b>	Anglican
<b>(1630–</b>	Protestant
<b>77)</b>	clergyman,
	degree, faculty,
	bourgeois.
<b>Boyle,</b>	Chemistry/phys
<b>Robert</b>	ics, Anglican
<b>(1627–</b>	Protestant,
<b>91)</b>	degree, faculty,
	nobility.
<b>Briggs,</b>	Mathematics,

<b>Henry</b> <b>(1561–1639)</b>	Puritan Protestant, degree, faculty, bourgeois.
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<b>Flamsteed, John</b> <b>(1646–1719)</b>	Astronomy, Anglican Protestant clergyman, degree, not faculty, bourgeois.
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<b>Gellibrand, Henry</b> <b>(1597–1663)</b>	Mathematics, Puritan Protestant clergyman, degree, faculty, bourgeois.
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<b>Gilbert, William</b> <b>(1540–</b>	Physics, Anglican Protestant,
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**1603)** degree, faculty,  
bourgeois.

**Grew, Biology,**  
**Nehemia Anglican**  
**h (1641–Protestant (his**  
**1712)** father was a  
Puritan  
clergyman, but  
he probably was  
a deist), degree,  
not faculty,  
bourgeois.

**Halley, Astronomy,**  
**Edmund atheist, degree,**  
**(1656–not faculty,**  
**1742)** bourgeois.

**Harvey, Biology/physiol**  
**William ogy, Anglican**  
**(1578–Protestant,**  
**1657)** degree, not

**Hooke,**  
**Robert**  
**(1635–**  
**1703)**

faculty, gentry.  
Physics/chemistry,  
Anglican  
Protestant,  
degree, faculty,  
bourgeois.

**Newton,**  
**Isaac**  
**(1642–**  
**1727)**

Physics/mathematics,  
Anglican  
Protestant,  
degree, faculty,  
bourgeois.

**Oughtred,**  
**William**  
**(1575–**  
**1660)**

Mathematics,  
Anglican  
Protestant  
clergyman,  
degree, faculty,  
bourgeois.

**Ray,**  
**John**

Biology,  
Anglican

**(1628–1705)** Protestant clergyman, degree, faculty, lower.

**Wallis, John** Mathematics, Puritan  
**(1616–1703)** Protestant clergyman, degree, faculty, bourgeois.

*French*

**Descartes, René** Mathematics, Catholic,  
**(1596–1650)** degree, not faculty, gentry.

**Fermat, Pierre** Mathematics, Catholic,  
**(1601–** degree, not

**65)** faculty, gentry.  
**Gassendi** Mathematics/p  
**, Pierre** hysics, Catholic  
**(1592–** priest, degree,  
**1655)** faculty,  
bourgeois.

**Mariotte,** Physics,  
**Edme** Catholic priest,  
**(1620–** degree, not  
**84)** faculty, gentry.

**Mersenn** Mathematics/p  
**e, Marin** hysics, Catholic  
**(1588–** priest, degree,  
**1648)** faculty, lower.

**Papin,** Physics,  
**Denis** Huguenot  
**(1647–** Protestant,  
**1712)** degree, not  
faculty,  
bourgeois.

**Pascal,** Mathematics/p  
**Blaise** hysics, Catholic,  
**(1623–** degree, not  
**62)** faculty, gentry.

**Picard,** Astronomy,  
**Jean** Catholic priest,  
**(1620–** degree, faculty,  
**82)** bourgeois.

**Vieta,** Mathematics,  
**Francisc** Catholic,<sup>2</sup>  
**us** degree, not  
**(1540–** faculty, gentry.  
**1603)**

### *Italian*

**Borelli,** Biology/physiol  
**Giovanni** ogy, Catholic,  
**(1608–** degree, faculty,  
**79)** lower.

<b>Cassini,</b>	Astronomy,
<b>Giovanni</b>	Catholic, no
<b>(1625–</b>	degree, not
<b>1712)</b>	faculty, lower.
<b>Fabriciu</b>	Anatomy,
<b>s,</b>	Catholic,
<b>Hierony</b>	degree, faculty,
<b>mus</b>	nobility.
<b>(1537–</b>	
<b>1619)</b>	
<b>Fallopious</b>	Anatomy,
<b>, Gabriel</b>	Catholic,
<b>(1523–</b>	degree, faculty,
<b>62)</b>	gentry.
<b>Galilei,</b>	Astronomy/phy
<b>Galileo</b>	sics, Catholic,
<b>(1564–</b>	degree, faculty,
<b>1642)</b>	gentry.
<b>Grimaldi</b>	Mathematics/p
<b>,</b>	hysics, Catholic

**Francesc** priest, degree,  
**o** (1618—faculty, gentry.  
63)

**Malpighi** Biology/anatom  
, y, Catholic,  
**Marcello** degree, faculty,  
(1628— gentry.  
94)

**Redi**, Biology,  
**Francesc** Catholic,  
**o** (1626—degree, faculty,  
97) gentry.

**Riccioli**, Astronomy,  
**Giovanni** Catholic priest,  
(1598— degree, faculty,  
1671) unknown.

**Torricell** Physics/mathe  
**i**, matics,  
**Evangel** Catholic,  
**sta** degree, not

**(1606–47)** faculty, lower.

**Vesalius, Andreas** Catholic,  
**(1514–64)** degree, faculty,  
gentry.

*German*

**Bayer, Johann** Astronomy,  
Catholic,  
**(1572–1625)** degree, not  
faculty,  
unknown.

**Guericke, Otto** Physics,  
Protestant,  
**von** degree, not  
**(1602–86)** faculty, nobility.

**Kepler,** Mathematics/as

**Johannes Kepler** astronomy,  
s (1571–Protestant,  
1630) degree, faculty,  
gentry.

**Kircher, Athanasius** Biology/geology  
Catholic priest,  
degree, faculty,  
(1601–bourgeois.  
80)

**Leibniz, Gottfried** Mathematics,  
Protestant deist,  
(1646–degree, not  
1723) faculty,  
bourgeois.

**Scheiner, Christoph** Physics/astronomy,  
Catholic  
priest, degree,  
h (1575–faculty,  
1650) unknown.

## *Dutch*

**Glauber, Johann** (1604–70) Chemistry, born Catholic, no degree, not faculty, lower.

**Graaf, Regnier de** (1641–73) Anatomy, Catholic, degree, not faculty, nobility.

**Huygens, Christiaan** (1629–95) Astronomy/physics, Protestant, degree, not faculty, gentry.

**Leeuwenhoek, Anton van** (1632–) Biology, Protestant, no degree, not faculty, lower.

**1723)**

*Danish*

**Brahe,** Astronomy,  
**Tycho** Protestant,  
**(1546–** degree, faculty,  
**1601)** nobility.

**Roemer,** Astronomy,  
**Olaus** Protestant,  
**(1644–** degree, faculty,  
**1710)** bourgeois.

**Steno,** Anatomy,  
**Nicolaus** Catholic priest  
**(1638–** (convert),  
**86)** degree, faculty,  
gentry.

*Flemish*

**Helmont** Chemistry,  
, **Jan** Catholic,  
**Baptista** degree, not  
**van** faculty, gentry.  
(1577–  
1644)  
**Stevin,** Mathematics/p  
**Simon** hysics, Catholic,  
(1548– degree, not  
1620) faculty, lower.

## *Polish*

**Copernic** Astronomy,  
**us,** Catholic canon,  
**Nicolaus** degree, not  
(1473– faculty, gentry.  
1543)  
**Hevelius,** Astronomy,  
**Johanne** Protestant,

**s** (1611–degree, not  
87) faculty, gentry.

*Scottish*

**Napier,** Mathematics,  
**John** Calvinist  
**(1550–** Protestant, no  
**1617)** degree, not  
faculty, nobility.

Examination of the 14  
English stars  
overwhelmingly refutes  
Merton: only three of them  
can be identified as  
Puritans: Briggs,  
Gellibrand and Wallis.  
Merton, and some others,  
have mistakenly identified

Grew as a Puritan, but this is refuted by his book *Cosmologia Sacra or a Discourse on the Universe as it is the Creature and Kingdom of God*. There, in true deist fashion, Grew denied the possibility of miracles.<sup>10</sup> As for the other 11 English stars, 4 were Anglican clergymen, and Halley was an atheist.

Nor does Merton fare any better when we examine the data on France. Rather than 'a large proportion' of them being Protestants, there is only one Huguenot Protestant out of nine,







Europe because only medieval Europeans believed that science was *possible* and *desirable*. The basis of their belief was their image of God and his creation. This was dramatically asserted to a distinguished audience of scholars attending the 1925 Lowell Lectures at Harvard by the great English philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), who explained that science developed in Europe because of the widespread ‘faith in the possibility of science . . .

derivative from medieval theology'.<sup>14</sup> This claim shocked not only his audience, but Western intellectuals in general when his lectures were published. How could this world-famous thinker, co-author with Bertrand Russell of the landmark *Principia Mathematica* (1910–13), not know that religion is the unrelenting enemy of science? In fact, Whitehead knew better!

Whitehead had recognized that Christian theology was essential for the rise of science, just as non-Christian theologies







secrets, just as Whitehead had noted. The great British philosopher concluded his remarks by noting that the images of God and creation found in the non-European faiths, especially those in Asia, are too impersonal or too irrational to have sustained science. Any particular natural 'occurrence might be due to the fiat of an irrational despot' god, or might be produced by 'some impersonal, inscrutable origin of things. There is not the same confidence as in the intelligible rationality of a







. . . as unthinkable'.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, none of the traditional Greek gods would have been capable of such a creation. But, worst of all, the Greeks insisted on turning the cosmos, and inanimate objects more generally, into living things. Consequently, they attributed many natural phenomena to *motives*, not to inanimate forces. Thus, according to Aristotle, heavenly bodies move in circles because of their affection for doing so, and objects fall to the ground 'because of their innate love for the centre of the

world'.<sup>21</sup> As for Islam, the orthodox conception of Allah is hostile to the scientific quest. There is no suggestion in the Qur'an that Allah set his creation in motion and then let it run. Rather, it is assumed that he often intrudes in the world and changes things as it pleases him. Thus, through the centuries many of the most influential Muslim scholars have held that all efforts to formulate natural laws are blasphemy in that they would seem to deny Allah's freedom to act. Thus did people's images of God and

the universe deflect scientific efforts in China, ancient Greece, and Islam.<sup>22</sup>

It was only because Europeans believed in God as the Intelligent Designer of a rational universe that they pursued the secrets of creation. In the words of Johannes Kepler, ‘The chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order and harmony imposed on it by God and which he revealed to us in the language of mathematics’.<sup>23</sup> In similar fashion, in his last will and

testament, the great chemist Robert Boyle (1627–91) wrote to the members of the Royal Society of London, wishing them continuing success in ‘their laudable attempts to discover the true Nature of the Works of God’.<sup>24</sup>

Notice that Whitehead did not suggest that some kinds of Christians were more likely than others to pursue science. But it would not be inconsistent with his theory to suppose that Protestants might have been more likely than Catholics to become scientists. So, let us pursue

that possibility with the data at hand.

**Table 5.1 Religious affiliation of scientists**

—	<i>All</i>	<i>Continent only</i>
Protestant	24	8
Catholic	28	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>36</b>

The claim that the ‘Scientific Revolution’ was the work of Protestants of any kind is clearly falsified by the data in Table 5.1. Only 24 of the 52 stars were Protestants, and with the English and one Scot removed, Catholics outnumbered Protestants

by 28 to 8, which approximates the distribution of Protestants and Catholics on the Continent in this era. Indeed:

there was nothing in the dogmas of Catholicism, Anglicanism, or Puritanism which made any one of them more or less favourable to science in general than any of the others . . . [in each, the majority held] that science should be welcomed as a faithful handmaid of theology.<sup>25</sup>

# Escape from the university

Perhaps because Roger Bacon attacked universities as 'adverse to the progress of science', it has been conventional for modern historians of the rise of science to condemn the universities, especially since this provided additional grounds to attack religion.<sup>26</sup> As Richard S. Westfall (1924–96) put it:

Not only were the universities of Europe not the foci of scientific activity, not only did





London coincided with the rise to prominence of Gresham College, located in London – a number of English scientists held joint appointments at Gresham and at Oxford and Cambridge.

In addition, 48 of the 52 stars (92 per cent) ‘were university educated, not in the conventional sense of two or three years, but over an extended period [often] of ten years or more’.<sup>29</sup> Put in modern terms, these stars attended graduate school. For example, after four years at the University of Krakow, Copernicus

went to Italy where he spent six more years at the universities of Bologna and Padua. Had he not been trained in Italy, it is inconceivable that Copernicus would have made any contributions to astronomy. Moreover, 28 of the stars served as professors for at least a period of their careers.

This is as it should have been because, rather than being opposed to science, the universities in this era were especially committed to it. As the distinguished historian of science Edward Grant put it: ‘The

medieval university laid far greater emphasis on science than does its modern counterpart.’<sup>30</sup>

## **Why England?**

Many have claimed that England was the primary setting for this scientific era. Merton focused exclusively on England in pushing his Puritan explanation, and the prominence of non-academics among the London scientific set encouraged many to disdain the role of the universities. Although both









brothers were only known as 'lords', and their sons were without any title at all. As Lawrence Stone (1919–99) reported, '[these untitled heirs] were pouring into the universities and the Inns of Court'.<sup>35</sup> As a consequence of these developments, the segment of the population from which scientists were most apt to be drawn was much larger in England than on the Continent. Perhaps, for that reason, English scientific stars in the era were far more likely to have been of bourgeois origins than were

continental scientists, as can be seen in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2 Class origins of scientists (percentage)**

<i>Class</i>	<i>England</i>	<i>Continent*</i>
Nobility	7	13
Gentry	7	45
Bourgeois	79	16
Lower	7	18
Unknown	0	8
<b>Total percentage</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total of scientists</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>38</b>

\* Includes the Scot John Napier.

These codes apply to each scientist's family. *Nobility* means one's father had a title. *Gentry* includes

people of high social status, but no title, such as government officials, and large landowners, or, as Deirdre McCloskey put it, ‘any dignified people just below the aristocracy’.<sup>36</sup>

*Bourgeois* fathers were in business, or were members of the professions, clergy, professors and the like. *Lower* refers to those from peasant or labouring backgrounds, there being only eight among these stars.

As is obvious, the English scientific stars were overwhelmingly from the bourgeois, while more

than half of the European stars were from the 'leisure class', gentry and the nobility – only 16 per cent were from the bourgeois.

This preponderance of bourgeois might seem to agree with those who have argued that the scientific enterprise was motivated by and sustained by concerns for practical advances in technology – especially in England.<sup>37</sup> The problem with this view is that at this time there were few if any technological applications made of the most



of technological progress. But the inventors and the scientists seem to have pretty much inhabited separate worlds. An example involves Denis Papin, one of the scientific stars, who claimed to have invented a better pump than the one designed by Thomas Savery and being widely used to drain British mines. To prove his point, Papin tried ‘in vain to get the Royal Society to conduct comparative tests’,<sup>38</sup> but the members did not find it a matter of interest. It seems not to have occurred to Papin to





## 6: The myth of Protestant individualism and suicide

It is a commonplace to identify Martin Luther as the ‘father of individualism’. According to the Church historian Martin Marty, Luther was ‘the greatest single agent in increasing the value of the individual’.<sup>1</sup> Or, to quote Derek Wilson, what Luther ‘did, without realizing it, was to provide oxygen to human individualism’.<sup>2</sup> Of course, eventually Luther had no sympathy for





Protestant Reformation. Tocqueville is, of course, famous for his two-volume work *Democracy in America*, based on his perceptive nine-month tour of the nation in 1831. He had much praise for the young republic, but he feared it suffered from excessive individualism. Among his concerns was that individualism leads to selfishness and this can result in people not working for the common good, but for each to remain 'shut up in the solitude of his own heart'. Against this, Tocqueville









defines the word as ‘subordination of the general interest to the individual interest’.<sup>8</sup>

That negativity is not limited to the French, but is widespread on the political left. Thus, in 1985, Robert Bellah (1927–2013) and four co-authors took their title from Tocqueville when they published *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. These authors’ antagonism towards individualism far exceeded Tocqueville’s and perhaps even Maritain’s:



In any event, they reported that their book was based on lengthy interviews with ‘over 200 persons’.<sup>2</sup> One of these was a nurse they named Sheila Larson, who served as their prime example of the self-centred American. As the book climbed the bestseller list, Sheila soon enjoyed brief fame as liberal intellectuals around the nation joked about ‘Sheila-ism’, often connecting her to the Republicans. It turns out, however, as the authors subsequently revealed, there was no Sheila. The people who appeared in the



remains nearly as famous as Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* – Émile Durkheim's *Le Suicide* (1897). As an introduction to Durkheim's book, it is useful to begin with why and how the French invented the field of sociology.

## **Discovering moral statistics**

In 1825 the French Ministry of Justice began to collect criminal justice statistics from the prosecutor's office of each





The first *Compte* was published in 1827 and copies were distributed to the nobility, members of parliament, and state functionaries.<sup>10</sup> Initially, the data were regarded as a somewhat interesting curiosity, but then they attracted the attention of a young attorney who quickly grasped their profound significance and devoted the remainder of his career to inventing empirical social research.

André-Michel Guerry (1802–66) was employed as a state prosecuting



French Royal Academy of Science.

The first of these patterns was that the rates were *extremely stable* from year to year. In any French city or department, every year almost exactly the *same number* of people committed suicide, stole, murdered their spouses or gave birth out of wedlock. And the *kinds of people* who did these things also was incredibly stable. For the five years from 1826 to 1830, the percentage of French women among those who were accused of thefts varied from 21 per





these are indeed fundamentally individual acts, why didn't the rates fluctuate wildly from year to year? If individual motives alone are involved, how could it be that year after year the same number of people in Paris or in Marseille took their own lives or killed their spouses?

There was no alternative but to conclude that there are very powerful forces outside the individual that cause the incredible stability and the equally incredible variations from place to place that the



the facts of the moral order, like those of the physical order, obey invariant laws, and that, in many respects, [these statistics] render this a virtual certainty.<sup>11</sup>

Then, by investigating whether social forces such as population density or the proportion of the population who were literate influenced variations on crime or suicide (they did), Guerry invented sociology, although it was another Frenchman, Auguste

Comte (1798–1857), who coined the name in 1844.

The interest in moral statistics soon spread and before long most west European nations were collecting and publishing them annually. And as they appeared, these reports gave even more forceful proof of the immense variations from place to place. For example, the suicide rate for 1870 was 8.5 per 100,000 population in Sweden and only 4.0 in Italy. Why? Enter Émile Durkheim (1858–1917).

# The curse of Protestant individualism

Durkheim did not face an intellectual vacuum when he first began to ponder variations in suicide rates. Twenty years earlier an Italian physician and professor at the University of Turin, Henry Morselli (1852–1929), had published a book based on suicide statistics. When he examined the suicide rates of seven German states (Mecklenburg, Saxony, Hanover, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Nassau and Baden), Morselli noticed



and he explained it this way:

Protestantism, denying all materialism in external worship and encouraging free inquiry into dogmas and creeds . . . tend[s] to develop reflective powers of the mind and to exaggerate the inner struggles of conscience. This exercise of the thinking organs, which, when they are weak by nature, is always damaging, renders them more sensible and susceptible to morbid impressions.<sup>12</sup>

When writing his book, also titled *Suicide*, Durkheim relied mainly on Morselli's statistics, with very little acknowledgement, and he also adopted Morselli's central observation and built upon his explanation, with no acknowledgement at all.

Durkheim began with the assertion that 'everywhere without exception, Protestants show far more suicides than do followers of other confessions'.<sup>13</sup> Then he formulated his 'theory' of why this is the case.

Although Durkheim cited several causal factors, a fine analysis by Barclay Johnson demonstrated that they all were one: that Durkheim explained the Protestant propensity for suicide as a result of what he identified as *egoism*.<sup>14</sup>

As Durkheim defined it, egoism is a form of individualism – of putting one's self-interests first and thinking for oneself. Moreover, a group made up of individualists will be less strongly integrated by interpersonal bonds among its members, as each will tend to withhold some

degree of commitment. Strongly integrated groups tend to protect their members from the worst intensities of life's ills, hence a lower suicide rate for Catholics and a higher one for Protestants. Durkheim put it this way:

The only essential difference between Catholicism and Protestantism is that the second permits free inquiry to a far greater degree than the first . . . the Catholic accepts his faith ready-made, without scrutiny . . . The





scientific revolution, it isn't so!

Durkheim was correct that groups having weak interpersonal bonds will have higher suicide rates, but Protestant groups are not less strongly bonded than are Catholic groups. Moreover, a series of studies, based on not only recent data, but also data for European nations dating from as long ago as 1870 – some of these being the very same data used by Durkheim – fail to show any Protestant effects on suicide.<sup>17</sup> Quite simply: Protestants do not have

higher rates of suicide than do Catholics!

Durkheim may have made an honest mistake by failing to realize that Denmark's off-scale suicide rate in 1870 (25 per 100,000 population) greatly distorted the average rate for Protestant nations (with Denmark omitted, the average for Protestant nations was only 7.5, compared with 7.9 for Catholic nations). But one cannot overlook Durkheim's intentional misrepresentations as he tried to explain away the embarrassing fact that

Catholic France had a suicide rate (15.0) more than twice as high as that of Protestant England (6.6) – the 1870 rate for Paris was 35.7, more than four times as high as London's rate of 8.6.

Durkheim's first attempt to dismiss the problem was to falsely claim that the English were a nation of uneducated illiterates: 'England, as we know, is the one Protestant country with the lowest suicides; it also resembles Catholic countries with respect to education. In 1865 there were still 23 percent of



different in terms of illiteracy!

Next, he tried to claim that England was not really a very Protestant nation. Rather, 'the Anglican church is far more powerfully integrated than other Protestant churches' despite the fact that 'England has been customarily regarded as the classic land of individual freedom . . . the Anglican clergy is the only Protestant clergy organized in a hierarchy. This external organization clearly shows an inner unity incompatible with

pronounced religious individualism.’<sup>19</sup>

Durkheim knew better than this! And I will never understand how generations of sociologists who read this could have swallowed such an absurdity. All of the Lutheran state churches of Scandinavia were and are hierarchical. Anglicans were not even a majority of English churchgoers at the time Durkheim wrote.<sup>20</sup> Surely the presence of a multitude of nonconforming Protestant bodies in England and the many English conflicts,



on the continent, it is because religious society there [in England] is much more strongly constituted and to this extent resembles the Catholic church.<sup>21</sup>

But, even as Durkheim wrote that, he was surrounded by scholars who were equally certain that individualism had developed sooner and more fully in England than anywhere else on earth.

**English individualism**

Nearly every nineteenth-century scholar concerned to understand the rise of industrial capitalism in Europe, including Karl Marx, Max Weber, and a flock of historians such as Thomas Babington Macaulay, focused his attention on England because it was the earliest and best-documented example of the switch from the feudal to the capitalist ‘mode of production’. As Marx explained, ‘That is the reason why England is used as the chief illustration in the development of my ideas.’<sup>22</sup>



Macfarlane explained, in a peasant society the

basic element of society is not the individual, but the family, which acts as a unit of ownership, production and consumption. Parents and children are also co-owners and co-workers. The separation between the household and the economy which Weber thought to be a prerequisite for the growth of capitalism has not occurred. For our purposes, the central feature is that ownership





kinship group. These religions established the superior community of faith and a common ethical way of life in opposition to the community of blood, even to a large extent in opposition to the family.<sup>24</sup>

As Reinhard Bendix (1916–91) summed up Weber's view: 'the Puritan divines brought about a profound depersonalization of the family and neighborhood life' which was linked to a 'decline in kinship loyalties and a separation of

business affairs from family affairs' which led to the 'isolation of the individual'.<sup>25</sup>

That became the settled opinion, repeated throughout most of the twentieth century. The illustrious David Riesman (1909–2002) took it for granted when he wrote his famous *The Lonely Crowd* (1950): modern individualism arose in the sixteenth century, propelled by the Reformation. Of course, Riesman thought individualism (inner-directedness) was a good







## 7: The myth of Protestant secularization

The prevailing wisdom has it that medieval Europeans inhabited an enchanted world, wherein religious places, images and activities were so ever-present that one could almost hear the angels sing. According to the celebrated Charles Taylor:

religion was  
'everywhere', was  
interwoven with  
everything else, and in  
no sense constituted a







in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others',<sup>5</sup> that belief in God came to be regarded as a *choice*. And, in the modern world, as some choose not to believe, the trend towards secularization accelerates.

In his monumental *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), Keith Thomas traces the disenchantment of the world in marvellous detail. Of course, Thomas celebrated not only the emancipation of the people



should have, as will be seen.

There is a second explanation of how Protestantism caused secularization that is entirely compatible with the first, and, if anything, even more widely embraced. By placing the burden on individuals to achieve their own salvation through the study of Scripture, licence was granted to endless organizational fragmentation and conflict. 'Once Pandora's Box of reform had been cracked open by Luther, there was





sorts of unwanted disagreement . . .

Doctrinal controversy was literally endless, [and the conflicts] were destructive and inconclusive.

The response ‘was to privatize religion and to distinguish it from public life’. The result was secularization, which in turn has ‘led to the proliferation of secular and religious truth claims along with related practices that constitute contemporary hyperpluralism’. So, Gregory asks: ‘What sort of

public life or common culture is possible in societies whose members share ever fewer substantive beliefs, norms and values save for a nearly universal embrace of consumerist acquisitiveness?’<sup>8</sup>

The claim that pluralism led to secularization is not merely a historical thesis. In the hands of sociologists it became a general theory of social integration. Peter Berger put it best in his *The Sacred Canopy* (1969). Citing many ‘founders’ of the social sciences, Berger claimed that ‘the classical

task of religion' is to construct 'a common world within which all social life receives ultimate meaning binding on everybody'.<sup>9</sup> This can only occur where a single faith prevails, enabling it to spread a 'sacred canopy' – a universal religious perspective – over the entire society. Thus, Berger concluded that the rise of pluralism has doomed religion in modern societies and therefore an irreligious future awaits us all. As Berger told the *New York Times*, by 'the 21st century, religious

believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture . . . The predicament of the believer is increasingly like that of a Tibetan astrologer on a prolonged visit to an American university.’<sup>10</sup>

But they are all wrong. It is not merely that Protestantism did not cause secularization; nothing did! Let us start at the beginning.

## **Myths of medieval piety**

Recall Chapter 1. Some enchanted world! The



intended . . . Members of the congregation jostled for pews, nudged their neighbors, hawked and spat, knitted, made coarse remarks, told jokes, fell asleep, and even let off guns . . . A Cambridgeshire man was charged with indecent behavior in church in 1598 after his ‘most loathsome farting, striking, and scoffing speeches’ had occasioned ‘the great offense of the good and the great rejoicing of the bad.’<sup>11</sup>

As for atheism being 'inconceivable', and there being 'no room . . . for doubt', it should be noted that atheists frequently have been observed even in the most primitive societies.<sup>12</sup> As for medieval Europe, deism was well known and atheism was far from unknown, being frequently lamented by Elizabethan and Jacobean writers.<sup>13</sup> There clearly were groups of atheists among the aristocrats, such as the group around Sir Walter Raleigh, and there is evidence of atheists in

humble circumstances too. This is well documented by Thomas, who concluded: 'Not enough justice has been done to the volume of apathy, heterodoxy and agnosticism which existed long before the onset of industrialism.'<sup>14</sup>

Granted that most medieval Europeans believed in the supernatural and resorted to magic when specific needs arose. But to attempt to compel or bribe various supernatural beings and forces to grant favours is a far cry from worship, and to equate this with living in



part, it reflects that far too many scholars rely on the received wisdom, even on matters central to their subject.

## **The virtues of pluralism**

Peter Berger was as wrong about the negative effects of pluralism as he was about the triumph of secularization. It is now well into the twenty-first century and religion was supposed to be all but gone by now. But, as we shall see, religion is stronger than ever worldwide.<sup>15</sup> And

people don't seem to need a sacred canopy to shield them from religious diversity. Apparently they are sufficiently served by 'sacred umbrellas', to use Christian Smith's wonderful image.<sup>16</sup> As Smith explained, people don't need to agree with all their neighbours in order to sustain their religious convictions; they only need a set of like-minded friends – pluralism does not challenge the credibility of religions because groups can be entirely committed to their faith despite the presence

of others committed to another religion. Thus, in a study of Catholic charismatics, Mary Jo Neitz found their full awareness of religious choices ‘did not undermine their own beliefs. Rather they felt they had “tested” the belief system and had been convinced of its superiority.’<sup>17</sup> And in her study of secular Jewish women who converted to Orthodoxy, Lynn Davidman stressed how the ‘pluralization and multiplicity of choices available in the contemporary United





cent are affiliated with a local church.<sup>19</sup>

During the nineteenth century, the positive effects of American pluralism on religious participation were well known to European observers. As the German Karl T. Griesinger put it: 'Clergymen in America [are] like other businessmen; they must meet competition and build up a trade . . . Now it is clear . . . why attendance is more common here than anywhere else in the world.'<sup>20</sup>

The American experience of the Catholic Church is

also quite instructive. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, when a massive influx of Catholic immigrants began in America, they brought with them the low levels of participation and concern that prevailed in their European nations of origin. Initially, many of these Catholic immigrants defected to Protestant groups that aggressively missionized among them. But the American Catholic clergy quickly adjusted by adopting Protestant techniques (including revival meetings) and soon

the American Catholic Church was far stronger and more effective than any national Catholic Church in Europe.<sup>21</sup>

Even in Europe, very modest variations in the extent of pluralism result in substantial differences in religiousness. The first application of the pluralism thesis to explain the low levels of religiousness in Europe<sup>22</sup> was limited to 14 major European nations<sup>23</sup> plus Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. During the analysis, those European nations that were more

than 80 per cent Catholic were omitted, but were dealt with later in a separate analysis.<sup>24</sup> The results were remarkably strong – pluralism accounts for more than 90 per cent of the total variation in church attendance across these nations. Moreover, the United States is not a deviant case, but lies close to the regression line – its unusually high level of church attendance being entirely consistent with its high level of pluralism. As for the Catholic nations, several studies have found

that Catholic commitment is higher to the extent that Catholics are a minority of the population – that is, where they face greater competition.<sup>25</sup>

Then came three subtle and persuasive studies based on Swedish data by Eva M. Hamberg and Thorleif Pettersson.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the very limited pluralism in Sweden, these scholars found very robust effects on church attendance. Even when pluralism consisted of nothing more than the extent of variation in the number and times of state

church religious services, attendance rates responded quite significantly.

These studies establish that a major reason for Europe's low rates of church attendance is the stultifying effect of lazy, subsidized, monopoly churches who manage to minimize competition. They also demonstrate that the proliferation of Protestant denominations would not have resulted in secularization – even if secularization had been occurring.

# The myth of secularization

Europeans have been predicting the death of religion for centuries. The first to specify a specific date was an Anglican clergyman, Thomas Woolston, who, writing in 1710, predicted that all traces of religion would have disappeared by 1900.<sup>27</sup> Fifty years later, Frederick the Great concluded that Woolston had been too pessimistic. Writing to his friend Voltaire, Frederick noted that ‘the Englishman





- All of the world's great faiths are growing, but Christianity is growing far faster than any of the others.
- Worldwide, 81 per cent claim to belong to an organized faith and many of the rest say they attend worship services.
- Regardless of their religion, 74 per cent of the earth's population say religion is an important part of their daily lives.
- Fifty per cent of the world's people say





nationwide surveys in 163 countries having 98 per cent of the world's population. I am grateful to the Gallup Organization for giving me access to these extraordinary data. Other statistics, such as those on atheism, come from the World Values Surveys and from the International Social Survey Programme. These multinational surveys include far fewer nations than do the Gallup World Polls, but are freely available to anyone.

Of course, most of the secularization faithful are not troubled by the



hardly be considered a substantial decline from medieval times! Moreover, few Europeans claim to be atheists, which is why the well-known British sociologist Grace Davie describes them as ‘believing non-belongers’.<sup>31</sup> And, like Davie, many British scholars have seized upon this phenomenon to reject the secularization thesis entirely. As Oxford’s David Nash put it in the subtitle of his recent article: ‘Secularization’s Failure as a Master Narrative’.

How has it failed? Because the definition of religion used to support the secularization thesis was too narrowly ‘churchly’ and failed to consider popular and unchurched forms of religious expression, counting them instead as irreligion.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, this point was made forcefully more than a century ago by Margaret Loane in her brilliant observations of working-class families:

To count up churchgoers and chapel-goers and argue that the neighborhood is without





tenure). Thus, for nearly all of the twentieth century the thesis prevailed that if church attendance declines, that proves secularization is occurring even if there is no decline in, or there even is a corresponding increase in, non-churchly forms of spirituality. As Sarah Williams noted:

The simplistic identification of religion with institutional church practice [continued] . . . in much of the work done in the 1960s and 1970s . . . Today, few





churches do not effectively recruit them!

In most European nations there is nothing resembling a religious 'free' market. In many there are still established state churches supported by taxes. In most of the rest, a particular religion is the object of considerable government 'favouritism'. And in nearly all European nations, the government bureaucracy engages in overt and covert interference with all religious 'outsiders' and 'newcomers' that challenge

the established religious order.

There are Lutheran state churches in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway, while in Sweden, the established position of the Church of Sweden (Lutheran) was ended in 2006, although the government continues to collect a religious tax on its behalf. There are two state churches in Germany, the Evangelical Church (Protestant) and the Roman Catholic Church, both supported by taxes, and their clergy are classified as civil servants.

Some cantons in Switzerland recognize Roman Catholicism as the state church; other cantons support an Evangelical Reformed state church. The Roman Catholic Church receives tax support in Austria and payments of more than 6 billion euros a year in Spain. In Italy, people choose the group to receive their church tax from a shortlist of Christian denominations and in Belgium there is no church tax, but the government provides very substantial support to Catholicism,

Protestantism,  
Anglicanism, Judaism,  
Islam, and a category  
called  
‘nondenominational’.

There is no church tax in  
the Netherlands, but the  
two primary Protestant  
churches and the Roman  
Catholics receive many  
large subsidies. No  
religious group receives  
direct government support  
in France, but the Catholic  
schools receive huge  
subsidies and immense  
favouritism is shown to the  
Roman Catholic Church by  
the bureaucracy. Finally,  
the Church of England

remains the established faith, but is not supported by taxes or government funds, being able to sustain itself from huge endowments built up during prior centuries of mandatory tithing.

These close links between Church and state have many consequences. First of all, they create lazy churches. The money continues to come whether or not people attend, so there is no need for clergy to exert themselves. Second, these links encourage people to view religion 'as a type of public

utility'.<sup>35</sup> Individuals need do nothing to preserve the Church; the government will see to it. This attitude makes it difficult for non-subsidized faiths to compete – people will be reluctant to contribute to a church. Thus, when some German evangelists attempted television ministries, they drew viewers, but not contributions,<sup>36</sup> since religion is supposed to come free.

The existence of favoured churches also encourages government hindrance and harassment











(3.9). But Grim and Finke's second measure, the Government Favoritism Index, tells a very different story.

The favouritism index is based on 'subsidies, privileges, support, or favorable sanctions provided by the state to a select religion or a small group of religions'. This index also varies from 0.0 (no favouritism) to 10.0 (extreme favouritism). Taiwan and Great Britain score 0.0 and Saudi Arabia and Iran each score 9.3. And while Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates

score 7.8, so do Iceland, Spain and Greece, while Belgium scores 7.5, slightly higher than Bangladesh's 7.3 and India's 7.0. Morocco scores 6.3, while Denmark scores 6.7, Finland 6.5, Austria 6.2, Switzerland 5.8, France 5.5, Italy 5.3 and Norway 5.2. Europe (but not Great Britain) has a religious 'market' highly distorted by government policies of favouritism, and that's that!

**Fertility and faith**



Muslim Europe since, quite unexpectedly, Muslim fertility has also dropped below replacement level (or is expected to do so in the next several years) in most nations, including those making up Europe.<sup>41</sup>

But there is a wild card in this deck. Religious Christian European women continue to have children well above the replacement fertility level. Table 7.1 was assembled by Tomas Frejka, of the Max Planck Institute in Germany, and Charles F. Westoff, of Princeton University.<sup>42</sup> They merged many

samples in order to accumulate a very large number of cases. The results are definitive!

**Table 7.1 Christian church attendance and fertility in Europe (women aged 35–44)**

<i>Women's church attendance</i>	<i>Fertility rate</i>
More than weekly	2.74
Weekly	2.23
1–3 times a month	1.93
Less than once a month	1.83
Never	1.79

*Source:* Frejka and Westoff, 2008.

The implications of these fertility differences have



show that for Europe as a whole, the religious population will outnumber the irreligious population in about four more generations! The time span will differ from country to country depending on the current ratio of religious to irreligious, but the eventual outcome will be the same if everything else remains constant. Then, if the birth rate of religious Europeans is sustained at above the replacement level, the population will grow and the churches will be full – for the first time.

## 8: The myth of harmful Protestant effects on the Catholic Church

It is widely agreed that the Protestant Reformations had a positive effect on Catholicism by prompting the so-called Counter-Reformation, when the church fathers gathered at the Council of Trent in 1551–2, and again in 1562–3, wherein they achieved significant, beneficial reforms. That aside, the rise of Protestantism is assumed to have done and to continue to do the

Church considerable harm, destroying its universality and often even forcing it to persist as a minority faith struggling to hold on to its members. That view is held by many Catholic prelates as well as by sociologists. Indeed, it was precisely because of such fears that the Church managed to shape government policies in Spain and the whole of Latin America, so that, until recent times, all Protestant competition was legally excluded.

Nevertheless, this too is a myth. The Catholic Church actually thrives on

Protestant competition and is far more successful and effective when forced to confront it.

I begin with studies done in America, since the great geographic variations in Catholic strength, from being an overwhelming majority in some places to a tiny minority in others, serve as a fine natural laboratory.

## **Competition and Catholic commitment**

The continental 48 United States include 171 Roman Catholic dioceses and these

were the basis for a study of competition and Catholic commitment in 1996.<sup>1</sup> That year, 82 per cent of the people living in the Brownsville, Texas diocese were Roman Catholics. Next highest was Providence, Rhode Island at 64 per cent followed by Boston, Massachusetts at 53 per cent. In contrast, the diocese of Knoxville, Tennessee was only 2.1 per cent Catholic, and Jackson, Mississippi was only 2.2 per cent.

The study used four measures of religious commitment:

1. The *ordination* rate: the annual number of ordinations of diocesan priests per 100,000 Catholics (diocesan priests are always ordained in their diocese of origin). The extent to which young men are motivated to enter the priesthood reflects the overall level of rank-and-file commitment in a diocese.

2. The *seminarian* rate: the number of students enrolled in secular (as opposed to religious orders)

seminaries. These are reported in terms of a student's home diocese even for students enrolled in a seminary maintained by another diocese.

3. The *priest* rate: the number of diocesan priests serving in the diocese per 10,000 Catholics. Because diocesan priests serve in their home dioceses, this is a measure of the history of ordinations in the diocese and thereby is less subject to

momentary  
variations.

4. The *conversion* rate: the number of adult baptisms per 100,000 Catholics per year. Given the primary role played by the laity in bringing others into their churches, a high rate of conversions reflects a high level of enthusiasm among the rank and file.

It turned out that all four of these measures were very highly, negatively correlated with the percentage of Catholics in the dioceses. That is, the



using states it was possible to add two quite different measures of commitment:

1. The *Catholic Digest* rate: the number of copies of this national Catholic magazine sold in each state as a percentage of the Catholic population.
2. The *Marian apparitions* rate: in recent years there have been an increasing number of reported individual encounters with apparitions of the Virgin Mary, among Catholics worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

This has given rise to an immense number of shrines and centres. Those located in the United States were transformed into state rates per 100,000 Catholics. South Carolina had the highest rate: 4 per 100,000. Massachusetts and New York had the lowest rates: 0.3 per 100,000.

These two measures of Catholic religiousness were very highly, negatively correlated with the per cent Catholic in a state, as were

the four other measures. That is, where Catholics were fewer, more of them read the *Catholic Digest* and more of them had visions of Mary.

This is as it should be. People, including clergy, tend not to work harder than they must and this tendency aggregates into the well-known principle of elementary economics that monopolies tend to be lazy and inefficient. Moreover, this principle was applied to churches in the very first published work of modern economics. Writing in 1776 about established religions



Protestants empowered the Catholic Church in Latin America.

## **Churching Latin America**

Latin America was long regarded as the Roman Catholic continent, fully Christianized by missionary monks and Spanish swords by the end of the seventeenth century. Throughout most of the twentieth century, official church statistics reported that well over 90 per cent of Latin Americans were

Roman Catholics. For example, the *National Catholic Almanac, 1949* reported that the per cent Catholic was 99.2 in Argentina, 98.0 in Bolivia, 97.0 in Brazil, 99.8 in Chile, and so on. These statistics were pure fiction. Ironically, they have been repeatedly used recently to ‘prove’ that there has been a massive defection from the Catholic Church in Latin America.<sup>4</sup> That too is pure fiction.

Although for several centuries the Roman Catholic Church was the only legal religion in Latin

America, its popular support was neither wide nor deep.<sup>5</sup> Many huge rural areas were without churches or priests, a vacuum in which indigenous faiths persisted.<sup>6</sup> Even in the large cities with their splendid cathedrals, mass attendance was very low – as recently as the 1950s perhaps only 10 to, at most, 20 per cent of Latin Americans were active participants in the faith.<sup>7</sup> Reflective of the superficiality of Latin Catholicism, so few men entered the priesthood that



Protestantism really damaged the Catholic Church? One might well suppose that Protestant competition could invigorate the Catholic Church in Latin America. We shall see.

## **The lazy Latin monopoly**

During the centuries of Spanish rule, the Catholic Church in Latin America was, for all practical purposes, a branch of government. Many government positions were staffed by priests and

monks and the Church was lavishly supported by mandatory tithes collected on its behalf by the state. The Church also held huge land grants which yielded large agricultural profits. Hence, the Church 'had become the dominant economic force in colonial society by the end of the seventeenth century'.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, in Peru 'there was scarcely an estate of any size that did not belong in whole or in part to clerics. In Lima, out of 2,806 houses, 1,135 belonged to religious communities,

secular ecclesiastics, or pious endowments'.<sup>12</sup> In addition to its wealth, the Church was in complete charge of the educational system throughout Latin America. There were no public schools, only those provided by the church. And that's pretty much how things stood until the twentieth century.

## **Protestant missions**

The first Protestants permitted to live in Latin America were small enclaves of foreign merchants, most of them

British and Americans, but no Protestant churches or missionaries were permitted. Until well into the twentieth century there even were legal bans on the sale of Bibles in most nations of Latin America, which led to the widespread belief that only Protestants accepted the Bible.<sup>13</sup>

The Catholic legal hegemony began to break down late in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth as 'liberal' revolutions strained the relations between the governments and the







missionaries on shorter tours. But, more important, the number of American missionaries in Latin America has fallen dramatically since 1996. In 2004 there were only 5,116.<sup>19</sup> Why? Because they have been replaced by Latin Americans! In many Latin American nations today, native-born evangelical Protestant clergy far outnumber both foreign missionaries as well as local Catholic priests.<sup>20</sup>

The rapid increase in native-born Protestant clergy spurred the rapid growth of Protestant

denominations in Latin America. But, although it is well known that this is taking place, statistics on actual Protestant membership have been scarce, scattered and of suspect validity. That is no longer the case. We now have data from the Gallup World Polls (described in Chapter 7) on the religious make-up of Latin America. Five tiny nations included in the Gallup World Polls were omitted on grounds that they are not an historic part of 'Latin' America. Four of them are former British colonies: Guyana,

Belize, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. Haiti is French-speaking and never was part of Latin America. Puerto Rico was excluded because, being an American territory, it has had a very different history from the Latin nations, and Cuba was excluded because it lacks religious freedom. That leaves 18 nations that are culturally and historically identified with Latin America. I have combined the surveys conducted for all years from 2007<sup>21</sup> in order to maximize the accuracy of the statistics.

All respondents were asked their religious affiliation. The results are shown in Table 8.1.

**Table 8.1 Protestants and Catholics in Latin America (percentages)**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Secular</i>
Guatemala	41	55	1	3
Honduras	39	56	3	2
El Salvador	39	57	2	2
Nicaragua	34	59	4	3
Brazil	26	66	4	4
Dominican Republic	24	67	2	7
Costa Rica	23	71	4	2
Chile	20	69	4	7
Panama	17	78	5	
Bolivia	16	81	1	2
Peru	16	82	1	1
Colombia	12	85	2	1
Ecuador	12	86	1	1
Argentina	11	82	1	6
Uruguay	10	53	8	29
Paraguay	9	89	2	
Mexico	7	91	1	1
Venezuela	8	87	3	2

*Source:* Gallup World Polls.

These statistics reveal that Protestantism has become a major religious presence in most of Latin America. Protestants make up more than a third of the population in 4 of these 18 nations, and a fifth or more in 8 of them. The *Other* category includes indigenous and African faiths. The *Secular* category consists of those who said they had no religion. The high total for the *Secular* category in Uruguay (29 per cent)





pluralism. And the eventual result was that most Latin Catholic hierarchies responded very energetically. This has been ignored in nearly every published study of Protestant growth in Latin America. Thus Harvey Cox<sup>25</sup> enthusiastically repeated David Stoll's prediction, made in 1990, that five or six Latin nations would have Protestant majorities by 2010 and that Protestants would be on the verge of becoming majorities in several more nations. As it happened, that prediction



than religious and was a resounding failure.

## **Liberationists**

During the 1960s, as energetic Protestant groups began to make rapid inroads in Latin America, some Catholic theologians diagnosed their success as an appeal to the material deprivations of the masses. In response they fashioned a counterstroke that, although long on theological language and imagery, was essentially political. Known as Liberation Theology, it was



societies from below, from a new base.

The primary theorist of Liberation Theology was the Peruvian Dominican priest Gustavo Gutiérrez who redefined salvation, discarding the emphasis on the individual and arguing instead that salvation is collective, taking the form of 'saving' the masses from bondage. Gutiérrez was a fully committed leftist who demanded 'a society in which the private ownership of the means of production is eliminated'. He often expressed his

admiration for the murderous 'Che' Guevara, explicitly linked his theology to the work of Karl Marx, and not once did he criticize the Soviet Union. As Richard Rubenstein noted, 'Liberation theology is thus profoundly anti-American and deeply hostile to the bourgeois capitalist world. It manifests no comparable hostility to the communist world.'<sup>27</sup>

Liberation Theology greatly appealed to many American priests and nuns, especially those associated with the Maryknoll Mission

Society, as well as to American and European intellectuals (especially social scientists) and to many clergy in Latin America – it was officially endorsed at a conference of the Latin American bishops at Medellin, Colombia in 1965. Although it was claimed that Liberation Theology was a response to the poverty of the masses, in reality national Catholic officials sanctioned Liberationists and their programmes to the extent that Protestant groups were making headway in

their nations.<sup>28</sup> But to no avail.

Base Communities failed to arouse the masses to attempt to establish Christian Socialism. In fact, most of the Base Communities never developed beyond loosely organized, non-residential study groups that formed in urban neighbourhoods.<sup>29</sup> In keeping with the tepid sort of religiousness that prevailed in Liberation Theological circles, these Base Communities were not attractive to poor people, but appealed

mainly to more educated, 'bookish' people.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, few Latin Americans ever became involved in Base Communities, probably no more than 2 million out of a total population of nearly 600 million.<sup>31</sup> It even has been suggested that Liberation Theology 'had more influence on Catholics . . . in Europe and the United States, than in Latin America'.<sup>32</sup>

Liberation Theology led nowhere because it was neither a revolutionary nor a religious movement, but involved a weak, self-

cancelling mixture of each. More importantly, the attempt to offer religiously tinged 'solutions' to material deprivations did nothing to stem the rapidly rising tide of Pentecostalism, if for no other reason than, contrary to the consensus among social scientists (as well as bishops), compensation for material deprivations is *not* the basis of the Protestant appeal.

## **Materialist humbug**

Social scientists interested in the rapid spread of

Pentecostal Protestantism in Latin America have been in remarkable agreement about who is joining: the typical convert is a very poor, uneducated, married, older woman with health concerns, who lives in a rural area.<sup>33</sup> More is meant by these observations than mere description. They are interpreted to demonstrate that Protestantism, especially of the Pentecostal variety, appeals primarily to 'the damned of the earth'.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that those I have cited above constitute an









50 to convert. Those with health problems are not more apt to become Protestants, and rural and urban residents are equally likely to convert. So much, then, for deprivation theory. And so much too for Liberation Theology, since the growth of Protestantism in Latin America seems to be based on religious attractions. The best proof of this is the success of the second Catholic response to the Protestant challenge.

**Catholic charismatics**

What has come to be known as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement was initiated by an outbreak of ‘baptisms in the Holy Spirit’ that began at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh in 1967,<sup>38</sup> and was taken south by American priests in the early 1970s. It is revealing that they ‘initially called themselves Pentecostal Catholics’,<sup>39</sup> and aside from some distinctive elements of Catholic culture such as an emphasis on the Virgin Mary, it is difficult to tell Protestant and Catholic charismatics apart. Both

conduct vibrant, emotion-packed worship services during which both clergy and members often engage in glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. Both put great stress on miraculous healing.

Having evolved into an international movement with a central headquarters in the Vatican, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) now provides the backbone of Catholic commitment in Latin America. Although there are no reliable national statistics on CCR membership, it is



Church could organize to mitigate material deprivations, but by sermons invoking the Holy Spirit, thereby activating religious motivations for religiousness.

## **Catholic renewal**

Although there are no reliable statistics on CCR membership broken down by nations, other statistics indirectly reveal the energizing effect of the CCR. In 1960, in the whole of Latin America there were only 4,093 men enrolled in Catholic

seminaries; by 2015 this had risen to 21,520.<sup>40</sup> Mass attendance has enjoyed a similarly huge increase, as can be seen in Table 8.2 overleaf, which shows the percentage of Catholics in each Latin American nation who said ‘yes’, when asked: *Have you attended a place of worship or religious service in the past seven days?*

**Table 8.2 Current Catholic mass attendance in modern Latin America (percentage)**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Attended in past seven days</i>
Guatemala	71
Colombia	68
El Salvador	67
Honduras	65
Ecuador	62
Costa Rica	62
Mexico	60
Paraguay	59
Bolivia	58
Nicaragua	58
Panama	57
Dominican Republic	53
Peru	52
Brazil	47
Venezuela	42
Chile	34
Argentina	31
Uruguay	20

*Source:* Gallup World Polls.

In most of Latin America today, Catholics are attending church at a truly remarkable level. In seven of these nations the weekly attendance rate is 60 per cent or higher – 71 per cent

in Guatemala. Six more nations have mass attendance rates above 52 per cent. Compare this with Spain where only 31 per cent of Catholics say they attend mass weekly. Argentina and Chile have attendance rates about the same as Spain, and only in Uruguay (20 per cent) is attendance at the low level thought to have been typical of Latin nations several decades ago – and Uruguay is a deviant case in many other ways as well.

Table 8.3 shows the percentage of the Catholics in each nation who

answered 'yes' when asked: *Is religion an important part of your daily life?* The level of subjective religiousness among Latin American Catholics is as astounding as their church attendance. Uruguay is much the lowest with only 53 per cent, but that is higher than in Spain (44 per cent).

**Table 8.3 Percentage of Latin American Catholics who say religion is an important part of their daily lives**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Paraguay	92
Honduras	91
Panama	90
El Salvador	89
Brazil	89
Bolivia	88
Colombia	88
Costa Rica	88
Dominican Republic	88
Guatemala	88
Nicaragua	85
Peru	85
Ecuador	83
Venezuela	75
Chile	74
Mexico	71
Argentina	67
Uruguay	53

*Source:* Gallup World Polls.

Of course, this is precisely the effect that pluralism should have had in Latin America unless the Catholic Church had failed to respond and simply faded away. That is,

Catholic mass attendance should be higher where Protestants have been more successful, thereby creating greater pluralism.

There is a very high positive correlation between the per cent Protestant and Catholic attendance ( $r = .451$  which is significant beyond the .05 level).<sup>41</sup> Where Protestants have been more successful, the Catholic response has been more energetic. A second test of the claim that pluralism has empowered Catholicism is that where Protestants have been

more successful, Catholic subjective religiousness ought to be higher too. And it is ( $r = .487$ ).

The Catholic Church has undergone a stunning awakening in Latin America. Where once the bishops were content with bogus claims about a Catholic continent and a reality of low levels of commitment, the Catholic churches in Latin America are now filled on Sundays with devoted members, many of them also active in charismatic groups that meet during the week. And the source of this

remarkable change has been the rapid growth of intense Protestant faiths, thus creating a highly competitive pluralist environment. Contrary to the sociological orthodoxy, pluralism results in more active and effective churches.

That the Catholic Church finally thrives in Latin America could be considered as partly a gift from Martin Luther.

## Conclusion: Prejudice and persistence

As is clear in Chapter 4, the myth of the Protestant Ethic and the rise of capitalism was convincingly refuted within a few years of its publication. And then, again and again – and yet again. But it won't die. It lives on in introductory sociology textbooks and among most sociologists who, not so long ago, ranked Weber's utterly debunked study as the fourth most important

sociological work of the twentieth century. Why? Indeed, why do so many scholars continue to repeat nonsense about Catholic opposition to science and thereby attribute the scientific ‘revolution’ to Protestantism? The answer is as simple as it is distressing: the English-speaking world remains in the grip of the bitter anti-Catholicism that arose during the religious wars produced by the Reformations. And that prejudice acts to certify Protestant virtues.



happened in both Montreal and New York City. Granted that few academics in either the United Kingdom or North America would endorse these incidents, but most of them no doubt still agree with the New York drama critics and public intellectuals when they praised *The Deputy*, a play in which Pope Pius XII is depicted as having been complicit in the Holocaust. Indeed, academics continue to give favourable reviews to books making these same charges, despite the fact that an all-star

group of Jews, including two prime ministers of Israel, condemned these claims and praised Pope Pius for his many effective efforts to save Jews during the Second World War.

Such behaviour inspired my colleague Philip Jenkins to write *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (2003) — although a Distinguished Professor at Baylor, Jenkins is British and a member of the Church of England. As for scholarly anti-Catholicism, last year I published *Bearing False Witness:*

*Debunking Centuries of Anti-Catholic History.* In response, several academics have accused me of being anti-Protestant, apparently unaware that I was raised a Lutheran. Worse yet, despite books such as Jenkins' and mine, anti-Catholicism will no doubt continue to thrive among English-speaking intellectuals – many of them routinely still refer to the 'Dark Ages' as an era of unmitigated backwardness imposed by Catholic opposition to learning and reason, although all qualified historians have





# Notes

## **Introduction: the mythical ‘Protestant’**

1 For a survey see Marshall, 2009.

2 Payton, 2010:224.

3 Instruction to Lutheran visitation inspectors, quoted in Strauss, 1978:252.

4 McGrath, 2007:7.

## **1 The myths of full pews, pious kings and limited monarchies**

1 Walzer, 1965:4.

2 Murray, 1972: 92.

3 Coulton, 1938:189–90.



21 Parker, 1992:45–6.

22 Quoted in Field,  
2008:214.

23 Both quotes from  
Thomas, 1971:164.

24 Thomas, 1971:165.

25 Thomas, 1971:164.

26 Coulton, 1938:157.

27 Thomas, 1971:163.

28 Quoted in Thomas,  
1971:163.

29 Obelkevich, 1976:279.

30 Strauss, 1978:211.

31 Dixon, 2012:116.

32 Dixon, 2012; Monod,  
1999.

33 MacCulloch, 2004:324.

34 Chadwick, 1972; Duffy,  
1992; Durant, 1957;  
Latourette, 1975;

- Ozment, 1975; Roberts, 1968; Tracy, 1999.
- 35 Chadwick, 1972:26.
- 36 Durant, 1957:639.
- 37 Bush, 1967; Hill, 1967.
- 38 Stark, 2004b: ch. 4.
- 39 Wuthnow, 1989:90.
- 40 Johnson, 1976:267; Woodward, 1974:19.
- 41 Inflation calculations in ‘Dissolution of the Monasteries’, Wikipedia.
- 42 Woodward, 1974:19.
- 43 Latourette, 1975:735.
- 44 Latourette, 1975:737.
- 45 Ozment, 1975.
- 46 Moeller, 1972; Ozment, 1975; Tracy, 1999.
- 47 Stark, 2004b:111.

48 ‘Relations between the Catholic Church and the state’, Wikipedia.

49 Rubin, 2016.

50 Sorensen, 2016:94.

51 *City of God*, book 4, ch. 4.

52 Deane, 1973:423.

53 Excerpted in O’Donovan and O’Donovan, 1999:492.

54 *On Kingship*, book 1, ch. 6.

55 Hunter, 1965:16.

56 Sorensen, 2016:94.

57 Ekman, 1957.

**2 The misfortune of state churches, forced piety and bigotry**



14 Nelsen and Guth,  
2015:99.

15 This material comes  
from Viola, 2015.

16 Gee and Hardy,  
1896:458–67.

17 Field, 2008.

18 In Field, 2008:219.

19 In Field, 2008:217.

20 In Field, 2008:221.

21 In Field, 2008:220.

22 Nelsen and Guth,  
2015:91.

23 Smith, [1776]  
1981:789.

24 Duffy, 1987:88; Picton,  
2015.

25 Alvarez, 2003.

26 Asberg, 1990:16–18.

27 Lodberg, 1989:7.

28 ‘Empty pews not the end of the world, says Church of England’s newest bishop’, *Daily Telegraph*, 9 June 2015.

29 North and Gwin, 2004.

30 Stark, 2016.

31 Stark, 2016: ch. 1.

32 Chazan, 1986:29.

33 Gritsch, 2012:xi.

34 Siemon-Netto, 1995.

35 Glock and Stark, 1966.

36 Shirer, 1960:236.

37 I have taken the excerpts of this work from the standard 55 volumes of *Luther’s Works* published by Fortress Press. There is an unsourced edition of

*The Jews and Their Lies*  
reprinted by Liberty Bell  
Publications and  
available on Amazon, but  
it appears to be  
incomplete and poorly  
translated.

38 Bainton, 1978; Brecht,  
1985–93.

39 Kittleson, 1986:274.

40 Steigmann-Gall, 2003.

41 See ‘Martin Luther and  
Anti-Semitism’,  
Wikipedia.

42 Probst, 2012:30.

43 Probst, 2012:59.

44 See ‘Martin Luther and  
Anti-Semitism’,  
Wikipedia.

45 MacCulloch, 2004:666.

46 Probst, 2012:129.

47 Steigmann-Gall, 2000.

### **3 The misfortune of nationalistic states**

1 Jones, 1987:106.

2 Stark, 2004b:56.

3 DeVries, 2010.

4 Bachrach and Bachrach, 2016:3.

5 Delbrück, 1982:327.

6 Oman, [1924] 1960:52.

7 Greengrass, 2014:xxvii.

8 Quoted in Michaud, 1855:51.

9 Porges, 1946:4.

10 De La Croix and Tansey, 1975:353.

11 Haskins, [1923] 2002:3.



25 ‘Conscription’,  
Wikipedia.

26 For a study  
demonstrating that  
nationalism does lead to  
war, see Schrock-  
Jacobson, 2012.

27 Schulze, 1996:267.

28 Jünger, [1920] 1961:5.

29 Schulze, 1996:267.

30 Kistner, 1976:63.

## **4 The myth of the Protestant Ethic**

1 Weber, [1904–5]  
1992:39–40.

2 Weber, [1904–5]  
1992:39.

3 Weber, [1904–5]  
1992:65.



13 Bellah, [1958] 2008.

14 Samuelsson, [1961]  
1993:15.

15 Quoted in Delacroix,  
1995:126.

16 Trevor-Roper, [1969]  
2001:20–1.

17 Braudel, 1977:66–7.

18 Delacroix and Nielsen,  
2001:545.

19 Sanderson, Abrutyn  
and Proctor, 2011.

20 Cantoni, 2015.

21 1 Timothy 6.10, RSV.

22 Little, 1978:38.

23 Collins, 1986:47.

24 Collins, 1986:55.

25 Collins, 1986:52.

26 Hayes, 1917; Herlihy,  
1957; Ozment, 1975.

- 27 Dickens, 1991.
- 28 Little, 1978:62.
- 29 Johnson, 2003:144.
- 30 Gimpel, 1976:47.
- 31 Gilchrist, 1969; Russell, 1958, 1972.
- 32 Little, 1978:93.
- 33 Dawson, 1957:63.
- 34 Duby, 1974:218.
- 35 Little, 1978:65.
- 36 Little, 1978:65.
- 37 Fryde, 1963:441–3.
- 38 de Roover, 1946:9.
- 39 Duby, 1974:216.
- 40 Duby, 1974:91.
- 41 Duby, 1974:91.
- 42 Gimpel, 1976:47.
- 43 Dawson, 1957; Hickey, 1987; King, 1999; Mayr-

Harting, 1993; Stark, 2003b.

44 Collins, 1986:54.

45 Chapter 48, *The Daily Manual Labor*.

46 Hilton, 1985:3.

47 Friedrich Prinz, as translated by Kaelber, 1998:66.

48 In Nelson, 1969:11; also Little, 1978:56–7.

49 Gilchrist, 1969:107.

50 Nelson, 1969:9.

51 Olsen, 1969:53.

52 In his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, quoted in de Roover, 1958:422.

53 I have relied on the translations of Aquinas'

*Summa Theologica*  
provided by Monroe,  
1975.

54 Little, 1978:181.

55 Gilchrist, 1969; Little,  
1978; Raftus, 1958.

56 Gilchrist, 1969:67.

57 Hunt and Murray,  
1999:73.

58 Dempsey, 1943:155,  
160.

59 de Roover, 1946:154.

60 Little, 1978:181.

61 Southern, 1970b:40.

62 For a summary see  
Stark 2003a.

63 Lopez, 1952:289; 1976.

64 Gies and Gies, 1969.

65 de Roover, 1963:75–6.

66 de Roover, 1963; Hunt, 1994; Lloyd, 1982.

## **5 The myth of the Protestant scientific ‘revolution’**

1 ‘Every body persists in its state of being at rest or of moving straight forward, except insofar as it is compelled to change its state by force impressed.’ Newton, [1687] 1971:13.

2 Shapin, 1996:1.

3 Merton, 1938:439.

4 Merton, 1938:440.

5 Merton, 1938:479.

6 Kearney, 1964: especially 95.

7 Kearney, 1964; Rabb, 1965.

8 I have made slight revisions from the list and data reported in Stark, 2016.

9 Vieta was accused of being a Huguenot because he defended the rights of French Protestants. But he was always a Catholic, even having made a public statement of faith. See ‘François Viète’, Wikipedia.

10 Garret, 2011:4.

11 Hillerbrand, 2003: ‘Huguenots’.

12 Merton, 1984:1108.



27 Westfall, 1971:105.

28 Gribbin, 2005:125.

29 Kearney, 1964:94.

30 Grant, 1984:68.

31 Stark, 2014.

32 Rashdall, [1936]  
1977:III:408.

33 Kearney, 1964:100.

34 Stone, 1964.

35 Stone, 1972:75.

36 McCloskey, 2010:403.

37 Mason, 1950.

38 Landes, 1994:649.

## **6 The myth of Protestant individualism and suicide**

1 Marty, 1993:53.

2 Wilson, 2008:344.

3 Sorensen, 2016:93.

4 Weber, [1904–5]  
1992:122.

5 Weber, [1904–5]  
1992:115.

6 Maritain, 1950:14.

7 Maritain, 1950:14–25.

8 Lukes, 1971:48.

9 Bellah et al., [1985]  
1996:xliv.

10 Beirne, 1993.

11 Guerry, [1833] 2002:14.

12 Morselli, 1879:125–6.

13 Durkheim, [1897]  
1951:154.

14 Johnson, 1965.

15 Durkheim, [1897]  
1951:157–9.

16 Merton, 1967.

17 Pope, 1976; Pope and Danigelis, 1981; Stark and Bainbridge, 1996; Stark, Doyle and Rushing, 1983.

18 Durkheim, [1897] 1951:165.

19 Durkheim, [1897] 1951:160–1.

20 Currie et al., 1977.

21 Durkheim, [1897] 1951:161.

22 As quoted in Macfarlane, 1978b:37.

23 Macfarlane, 1978a:255–6.

24 As quoted in Macfarlane, 1978b:50.

25 Bendix, 1966:70–1.

26

# **7 The myth of Protestant secularization**

1 Taylor, 2007:2, 26.

2 Manchester, 1993:20.

3 Headley, 1987:21.

4 R. W. Scribner, MS  
quoted in Headley,  
1987:28.

5 Taylor, 2007:3.

6 Walsham, 2008:528.

7 Sorensen, 2016:94.

8 Gregory, 2012:21.

9 Berger, 1969:133–4.

10 Berger, 1968.

11 Thomas, 1971:161–2.

12 Geertz, 1966.

13 Thomas, 1971:166.

14 Thomas, 1971:173.

15 Stark, 2015.

16 Smith, 1998:106.

17 Neitz, 1987:257–8.

18 Davidman, 1991:204.

19 Finke and Stark, 1992;  
Stark, 2008.

20 Grund in Powell (ed.),  
1967:77,80.

21 Finke and Stark, 1992.

22 Iannaccone, 1991.

23 Austria, Belgium,  
Denmark, Finland,  
France, Great Britain,  
Germany (West),  
Ireland, Italy,  
Netherlands, Norway,  
Spain, Sweden,  
Switzerland.

24 Stark, 1992, 1998.

25 Stark, 1992, 1998.

26 Hamberg and  
Pettersson, 1994, 1997;  
Pettersson and Hamberg,  
1997.

27 Woolston, 1735.

28 Quoted in Redman,  
1949:26.

29 Stark, 2015:50.

30 Tomasson, 1980.

31 Davie, 1994.

32 For a brilliant  
summary see Clark,  
2012.

33 Loane, [1906] 2012:26.  
Brought to my attention  
by Williams, 1999:1.

34 Williams, 1999:2–3.

35 Berger, Davie and  
Fokas, 2008:16.

36 Schmied, 1996.

37 Beckford, 1985:286.

38 Lodberg, 1989.

39 Selthoffer, 1997.

40 Grim and Finke, 2006.

41 Eberstadt and Shah,  
2012.

42 Frejka and Westoff,  
2008.

## **8 The myth of harmful Protestant effects on the Catholic Church**

1 Stark, 1998.

2 Zimdars-Swartz, 1991.

3 Smith, [1776] 1981:789.

4 Encarnación, 2013.

5 Stark, 1992.

6 Robinson, 1923.



17 Stark and Finke,  
2000:153, Table 8.

18 Siewert and Valdez,  
1997.

19 Welliver and Northcutt,  
2004:32.

20 Stoll, 1990:6.

21 Prior to 2007, the  
Gallup World Poll did  
not distinguish  
Protestants and  
Catholics, but classified  
both as 'Christians'.

22 Barrett, Kurian and  
Johnson, 2001.

23 Jenkins, 2002:64;  
Martin, 1990, 143.

24 Jenkins, 2002:64.

25 Cox, 1995:168.

26 Drogus, 1995:465.

27 Rubenstein, 1985–  
6:162.

28 Gill, 1998.

29 Gooren, 2002.

30 Burdick, 1993; Hewitt,  
1991; Mariz, 1994.

31 Cavendish, 1994;  
Hewitt, 1991.

32 Gooren, 2002:30.

33 Brusco, 1993, 1995;  
Burdick, 1993; Chesnut,  
2003a,b, 1997; Cox,  
1995; Gill, 1998; Martin,  
1990, 2002; Stoll, 1993,  
1990.

34 Martin, 2002:3.

35 Niebuhr, 1929:19.

36 Cohn, 1961:xiii.

37 The results are reported in detail in Stark and Smith, 2010.

38 Laurentin, 1977; Mansfield, 1992.

39 Chesnut, 2003a:61.

40 *Catholic Almanac*, 1961, 2016.

41 For all correlations reported in this study, a scatterplot was examined and statistical tests performed to guard against an outlying case(s) distorting the results.

**Conclusion: prejudice and persistence**

1 Viereck, 1953:45.

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